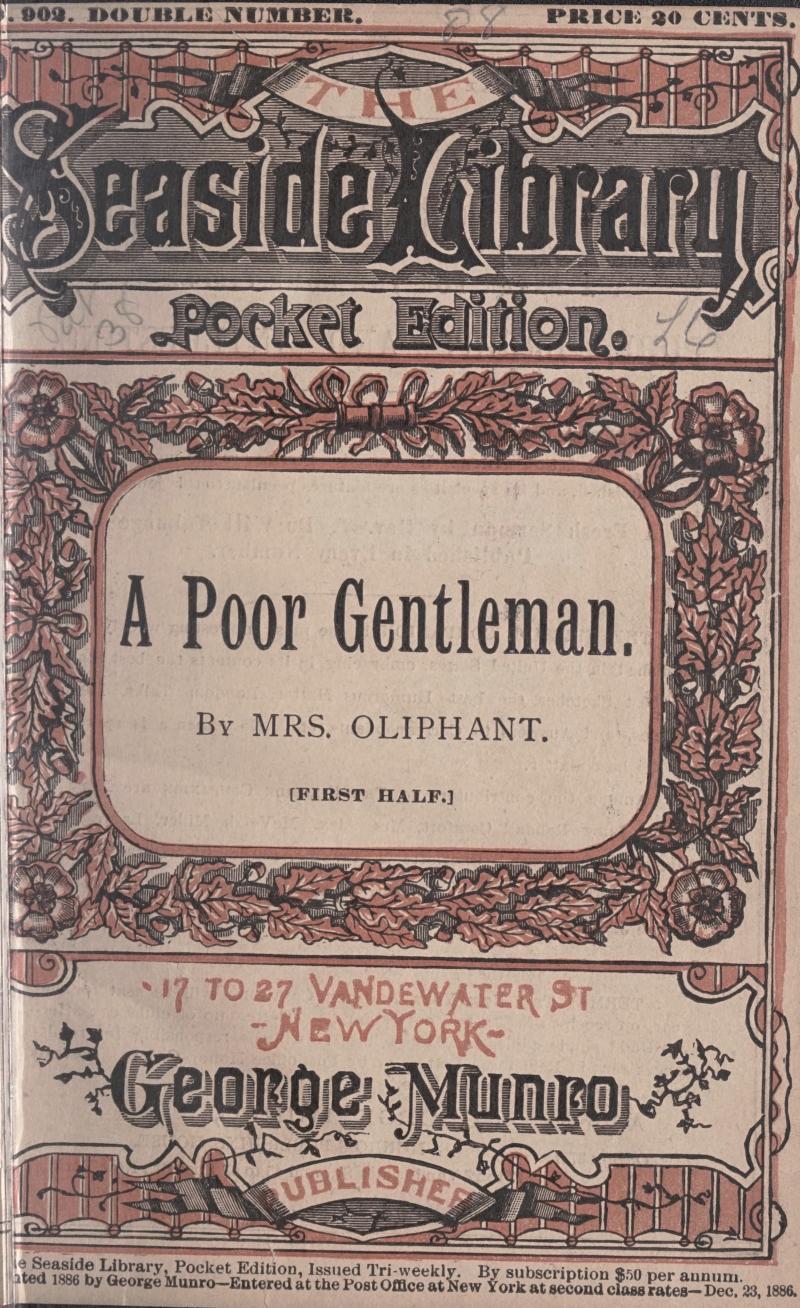




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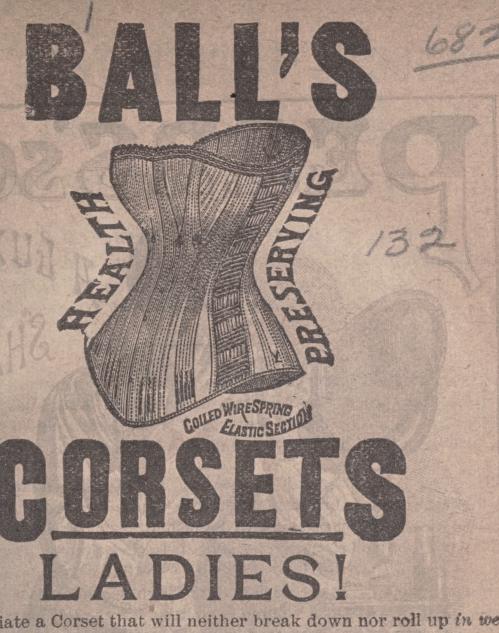
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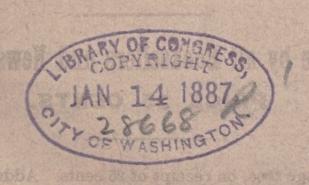
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CHAPTER I.

THE TWO FAMILIES.

THE house of Penton is one of the greatest in the county of which it is an ornament. It is an old house, but not of the kind which is now so generally appreciated and admired. It is not Elizabethan nor Jacobean, nor of the reign of Queen Anne. The front is Grecian, or rather Palladian, in heavy stone supplemented by plaster, with the balustrades of a stony terrace surmounting the level frontage of the single story, lofty, yet flat, which stretches like a screen across the higher cluster of building which forms the body of the house. When you turn the corner from this somewhat blank and low but imposing line you come upon the garden-front, which is of the livelier French order of architecture, with long windows, and many of them. The gardens are the pride of the house. These are arranged in terraces and parterres, brilliant with flowers, and there is even an elaborate system of water-works, a little out of order now, and a few statues here and there, half covered with lichens, yet not unworthy of better preservation. The rooms inside are lofty and sumptuous, intended for great entertainments and fine company, but the gardens are such as Watteau would have delighted in, and which he might have made the scene of many a fête champêtre and graceful group of fine ladies and fine gentlemen in costumes more brilliant than are now thought of. The grounds at Penton, indeed, are still filled at times with parties of gayly dressed people, and the lawns brightened by maidens in muslin and young men in flannels; but Watteau would have had no sympathy with the activities of lawn-tennis. That popular game, however, was not pursued with any enthusiasm

There was no youth in the house. Sir Walter Penton was an old man, and though he had, like most old gentlemen who figure in romance, an only daughter, she was not either young or fair. She was a lady of somewhat stern aspect, between forty and fifty, married, but childless. The household consisted of her father, her husband, and herself, no more. And there were many circumstances which com-

bined to make it anything but a cheerful house.

Three or four miles from Penton, but on a lower level, lay the house of Penton Hook. It was on the banks of the river, planted on a piece of land which was almost an island in consequence of the curve of the stream which swept round it. The great house stood high on the brow of the bank, an object seen many miles off, and which was the distinguishing feature of the landscape. The smaller one -so small that it was scarcely worthy to be called a country-place at all—lay low. When the river was in flood, which happened almost every winter, Penton Hook stood dismally, with all its little gardens under water, in what seemed the middle of the stream. And though the Pentons all protested that the water never actually came into the house, which was raised on a little terrace, their protest was received by all their neighbors with shaking of theirheads. Everything was green and luxuriant, as may be supposed. The house was so covered with creepers that its style was undefinable. A little glimmer of old red brick, delightfully toned and mellowed, looked out here and there from amid the clusters of feathery seed-pods on the clematis, and below the branches of the gloire de Dijon in winter. In the brighter part of the year it was a mass of leaf and flower; but during all the dark season, when the water was up, when the skies were dark, damp and dreariness were the characteristics of Penton Hook. The rooms looked damp, there was a moist look about the tiles in the little hall. The paper was apt to peel off and the plaster to fall. There were many people who declared that the house was a very fever-trap, and everybody was of opinion that it must be unhealthy. It ought to have been so, indeed, by every rule of sanitary science. A kind Providence alone took care of the drainage. Mr. Penton did not know much about it, and took care not to inquire; for had he inquired it would probably have been necessary to do something, and

he had no money to spend on such vanities. Neither, indeed, did there seem much occasion, for, notwithstanding what everybody said, eight young Pentons, tall and straight, and ailing nothing, with appetites which were the despair of their mother, grew up and flourished among the mud and

damp, and set all prognostications at defiance.

Nothing could be more unlike than the two families who bore the same name, and lived within sight of each other. The one all gravity and importance and severe splendor; the other poor, irregular, noisy, full of shifts and devices, full of tumult and young life. Mrs. Penton, Sir Walter's daughter (for her husband, who was nobody in particular, had taken her name), went from time to time with the housekeeper through the ranges of vacant rooms, all furnished with a sort of somber magnificence, to see that they were aired and kept in order; while her namesake at the Hook (as it was called) schemed how to fit a bed into a new corner, as the boys and girls grew bigger, to make room for their lengthening limbs and the decorums which advancing years demanded. It was difficult to kill time in the one house, and almost impossible to find one day long enough for all the work that had to be done in it, in the other. In the one the question of ways and means was a subject unnecessary to be discussed. The exchequer was full, there were no calls upon it which could not be amply met at any moment, nor any occasion to think whether or not a new expense should be incurred. Mr. Russell Penton, prehaps, the husband of Mrs. Penton, had not always been in this happy condition. It was possible that in his experience a less comfortable state of affairs might have existed, or even might still, by moments, exist; but so far as the knowledge of Sir Walter and his daughter went, it was only mismanagement, extravagance, or want of financial capacity which made anybody poor; they could not understand why their relations at the Hook should be needy and embarrassed. The he had a loss as was carry

"So long as one knows exactly what one's means are," said Mrs. Penton, "what difficulty can there be in arranging one's expenditure? There are certain things which can, and certain things which can't be done on a certain income. All that is necessary is to arrange one's outgoings accordingly."

"You see that, my dear," Sir Walter would reply, "for

you were born with the spirit of order; but there are some

people who have no sense of order at all."

The some people were the poor people at Penton Hook. These remarks were made on a day in winter, when the family at the great house were together in the library. It was a very comfortable room, nay, a beautiful one. The house was warmed throughout, and in December was genially, softly, warm as in May, no cold to be got anywhere in corridors or staircases. The fire in the library was a wood-fire, for beauty and pleasantness rather than for warmth. The walls were lined with books, dim lines of carved shelves with gleams of old gilding, and an occasional warm tone of mellowed Italian vellum here and there giving them a delightful covering. The large window looked across the country, commanding the whole broad plain through which the river ran. This landscape fell away into lovely tones of distance, making you uncertain whether it was the sea or infinitude itself at which you were gazing, in far-away stretches of tender mist, and blueness and dimness, lightly marked with the line of the horizon. Over the mantel-piece there was one picture, the portrait of an ancestor of whom the Pentons were proud—a veritable Holbein, which was as good, nay, far better, than the most finely emblazoned family pedigree. There was no room for other pictures because of the books which filled every corner; but a port-folio stood open upon a stand in which there was a quantity of the finest old engravings, chiefly historical portraits. Amid this refined and delightful luxury it would be foolish to mention the mere furniture, though that was carved oak, and very fine of its kind. Sir Walter himself sat surrounded by all the morning papers, which, as Penton was not very far from town, were delivered almost as early as in London. Mrs. Penton had a little settlement of her own between the fire and one of the windows, where she made up her household accounts, which she did with the greatest regularity. Mr. Russell Penton was the only member of the little party who seemed at all out of place. He had no special corner which he made his own. He was a restless personage, prone to wander from the fire to the window, to look out though there was nothing particular to look at, nothing more than he saw every day of his life, as his wife sometimes said to him. He ran over the papers very quickly, very often standing before the fire, which was a favorite trick of his; and after he had got through that morning duty he would lounge about disturbing everybody—that is, disturbing Mrs. Penton and Sir Walter, who were the only people subject to be affected by his vagaries. He never had letters to write, though this is one of the first duties of man, of the kind of man who has nothing else to do. A man who has no letters to write should at least pretend to do so, assuming a virtue if he has it not, in the leisure of a country house; or he should have some study, if it were only the amount of the rainfall; or he should draw and expound art. But none of all these things did Mr. Russell Penton do. And he had not the art of doing nothing quietly and gracefully as some men have. He was restless as well as idle, a combination which is more trying to the peace of your house-mates than any other can be.

Sir Walter was essentially well-bred, and the carpets were very thick, and the paneling of the floors very solid; but yet there is always a certain thrill under a restless foot, however steady the flooring is and however thick the carpet; and Mrs. Penton could not help seeing that her father now and then stopped in his reading and fixed his eyes and contracted his eyebrows with a consciousness of the movement. But after all it is difficult to find fault with one's husband for nothing more serious than walking from the fire to the window and from the window back to the fire.

Yet it was this rather detrimental and unmeaning personage who chose suddenly, without any reason at all, to cross the current of family feeling. "The spirit of order is a very good thing," he said, all at once, making his wife hold her breath, "but, in my opinion, when you have a large family a little money is still better." This speech was launched into the domestic quiet like an arrow from a bow

"Better!" said Sir Walter, letting his newspaper drop upon his knees, and pushing up his spectacles upon his forehead the better to see the speaker, who was standing, shutting out the pleasant blaze of the log on the fire in his usual careless way.

"Gerald means," said his wife, "that it is easier to keep things in order when there is money. I have heard people say so before, and perhaps it is true—to a certain extent. You know, sir, that when one has money in hand one can

buy a thing when it is cheap; one can lay in one's provisions beforehand. The idea is not original, but there is a

certain amount of truth in it, I dare say." awob gomeo He

"No one supposed there was not truth in it," said Sir Walter; "for that matter there is truth in everything, the most paradoxical statement you may choose to make; but these people are not without money, I suppose. They have an income, whatever the amount may be. They are not destitute. And so long as you have certain means, as you were yourself saying, Alicia, you know what you can afford to spend, and that is what you ought to spend by every law, and not a penny more."

"Nothing could be more true," said Mrs. Penton, with a look from under her eyelids to her husband, who was fidgeting from one leg to another, restless as usual; "and speaking of that," she said, with curious appropriateness, "I have been anxious to ask you, papa, about the tapestry chamber, of which, you know, we have always been so proud. Mrs. Ellis and I have made a very odd discovery—the moth has got into one of the best pieces. We have done all we could, and I think we have arrested the mis-

chief, but to put it right is beyond our powers."

"Dear me! the tapestry!" cried Sir Walter; "that's serious indeed—the moth! I should think you might have done something, you and all your women, Alicia, to keep out a moth."

"One would think so, indeed," she said, with a smile, but it is not so easy as it seems. It is an insidious little creature, which gets in imperceptibly. One only discovers it when the mischief is done. Gerald, who is so very clever in such matters, thinks we had better get a man over from Paris, from the Gobelins. It would be a good deal of trouble, but still it is the best way."

"I was not aware that Gerald knew anything about such matters," said Sir Walter. "As for the trouble, it is only writing a letter, I suppose. But do it, do it. I can not have anything happen to my tapestry. A man from Paris will be a nuisance—they're always a nuisance, those sort of

fellows-but get it done, get it done."

"I will write at once," Mrs. Penton said.

"I remember that tapestry as long as I remember anything," said the old gentleman, musing. "In the firelight we used to think the figures moved. It used to be

my mother's room. How frightened I was, to be sure! One night, I recollect, the hunters and the hounds seemed all coming down upon us. There was a blazing fire, and it was the dancing of the flames, don't you know? I was no bigger than that," he said, putting his hand about a foot from the ground. The recollection of his infancy pleased the old man. He smiled, and the expression of his face softened. There was nothing cruel or unkind in his aspect. He was a little rigid, a little severe, very sure that he was right, as so many are; but when he thought of his mother's room, and himself a little child in it, his ruddy aged countenance grew soft. Had there been another little child there, to climb upon his knee, it would have melted altogether. But Providence had not granted that other little child. He gave a wave of his hand as he dismissed these gentle thoughts. "But get the man from Paris, my dear; don't let anything go wrong with the tapestry," he said.

Mr. Russell Penton went out as his wife turned to her writing-table, and at once began her necessary letter. It was true that it was he who recommended that a man from Paris should be procured, but he had done it without any of that cleverness in such matters which his wife attributed to him. He was not, perhaps, a man entirely adapted for the position in which he found himself. He had occupied it for a long time, and yet he had not yet reconciled himself to that constant effort on his wife's part to make him

agreeable to her father.

For his own part he had no desire to be disagreeable to Sir Walter or any man; he had married with a generous affection if not any hot romantic love for Alicia; for they were both, he thought, beyond the age of romantic love. She had been thirty-five, very mature, very certain of herself; while he, though a little older and a man who had, as people say, knocked about the world for a long time, and undergone many vicissitudes, was not at all so sure. She had picked him up out of-not the depths, perhaps-but out of an uncomfortable, unsettled, floating condition, between gentility and beggary; and had taken him into the warmest delightful house, and made everything comfortable for him. He had been very willing to make himself agreeable, to do what he could for the people who had done so much for him, and yet so unreasonable was he that he had never been able quite to reconcile himself to the position. He could scarcely endure those warning glances not to go too far, not to say this or that, or her pretenses of consulting him, of being guided by his counsels, the little speeches, such as had been made to-day, about Gerald being so clever—which was his wife's way of upholding her husband. He was not clever, and he did not wish to pretend to be so. He was not cautious, and he could not take the credit of it. He had been thought to be a fortune-hunter when he married, and he was supposed to be a time-server now; and yet he was neither one thing nor the other. He was fond of Alicia and he liked Sir Walter well enough; yet there were moments when he would rather have swept a crossing than lived in wealth and luxury at Penton, and when the sacrifices which he had to make, and the advantages which he gained in return, were odious to him, things

which he could scarcely bind himself to bear.

This was perhaps the reason why, as he went out, without anything to do or to think of, and looking across that wide, bare, yet bright, wintery landscape, losing itself in the wistful distance, caught the chimneys of Penton Hook appearing among the bare trees, there occurred to his mind a contrast and comparison which made his sensations still less agreeable. It was nobody's fault, certainly not his, not even Sir Walter's, that the Pentons at the Hook were so poor, that there were eight children of them, that it was so difficult for the parents to make both ends meet. Could Sir Walter have changed the decrees of Providence by any effort in his power, it was he who should have had those eight sturdy descendants. He would have accepted all the responsibilities gladly; he would have secured for those young people the best of everything, an excellent education, and all the advantages that wealth could give. But the children had gone where poverty, not riches was; and to Sir Walter and Alicia it was a wonder that their parents could not keep within their income, that they could not cut their coat according to their cloth, as it is the duty of all honest and honorable persons to do. Alicia in particular was so very clear on this point; and then she had turned to her table, and written her letter, and ordered the man to be sent from Paris from the great Gobelins manufactory to mend the damages made by the moths in the old tapestry! How strange it was! Russell Penton could not tell what was wrong in it. Perhaps there was no

conscious wrong. They had a right to have their tapestry mended, and it was pretty, he could not but confess, to see the old man forget himself and talk of the time when he was a child. What was that about a treasure which rust or moth could not corrupt? It kept haunting his ear, yet it was not applicable to the situation. It would be a thousand pities to let the tapestry be spoiled. And as for taking upon his shoulders the burden of Mr. Penton's large family, no one could expect old Sir Walter to do that. What was wrong in it? And, on the other hand, he could not find it in his heart to blame the poor people at the Hook who had so many cares, so much to do with their income, so many mouths to feed. It was not their fault, nor was it the fault of Alicia and her father. And yet the heart of the man, who was little more than a looker on, was sore. He could do nothing. He could not even find any satisfaction in blaming one or the other; for, so far as he could see, nobody was to blame.

CHAPTER II.

DE RECEIRE THE STREET PENTON.

THE family at Penton had not always been so few in number. Twenty years before the opening of this history there were two sons in the great house; and Alicia, now so important, was, though always a sort of princess royal, by no means so great a personage as now. She was the only daughter of the house, but no more; destined apparently, like other daughters, to pass away into a different family and identify herself with another name. The two brothers were the representatives of the Pentons. They were hopeful enough in their youth-healthy, vigorous, not more foolish than young men of their age, with plenty of money and nothing to do; and it was a surprise to everybody when, one after the other, they took the wrong turn in that flowery way of temptation, so smooth to begin with, so thorny at the end, which is vulgarly termed "life." No such fatal divergence was expected of them when Walter came of age, and all the neighborhood was called together to rejoice. They were both younger than their sister, who was already the mistress of the house, and a very dignified and stately young lady, at this joyful period. Their mother

had died young, and Sir Walter was older than the father of such a family generally is. He had, perhaps, not sufficient sympathy with the exuberance of their spirits. Perhaps the quiet which he loved, the gravity of his house, repelled them and led them to form their friendships and seek their pleasures elsewhere. At all events, the young Pentons "went wrong," both of them, one after the other. Edward Penton, of the Hook, a young relation of no importance whatever, was much about the house in those He was the son of Sir Walter's cousin, who had inherited the house at Penton Hook from some old aunts. maiden sisters of a far-back baronet, so that the relationship was not very close. But the bonds of kindred are very elastic, and count for much or for nothing, as inclination and opportunity dictate. Edward was much more about the house of Penton than was at all for his good. He fell in love with Alicia for one thing, who naturally would have nothing to say to her poor relation; and, what was still worse, he was swept away by Walter and Reginald in the course of their dissipated career into many extravagances and follies. They drew him aside in their train from all the sober studies which ought to have ended in a profession; they taught him careless ways, and the recklessness which may be pardonable in a rich man's son, but is crime in the poor. It is true that there was something in him-some gleam of higher principle or character, or perhaps only the passive resistance of a calmer nature, which held him back from following them to the bitter end of their foolish career; but all the same they did him harm-harm which he never got the better of, though it stopped short of misery and ruin. They themselves did not stop short of anything. There are some sins like those which made the heart of the Psalmist burn within him—sins which seem to go unpunished, and in the midst of which the wicked appear to flourish like a green bay-tree. And there are some which carry their own sentence with them, and in which the vengeance does not tarry. Even in the latter case ruin comes more slowly to the rich than to the poor. They have more places of repentance, more time to think, more possibility, if a better impulse comes to them, of redeeming the past; but yet, in the end, few escape who embark their hopes and prosperity on such a wild career.

There were ten years in the history of the Penton house-

hold of which the sufferings and the misery could not be told. Sir Walter and his daughter lived on in their beautiful house and watched the headlong career toward destruction of these two beloved boys (still called so long after they had become men) with anxiety and anguish and despair which is not to be told. There are few families who do not know something of that anguish. Of all the miseries to which men and women are liable there is none so terrible. In every other there is some alleviation, some gleam of comfort, but in this none. The father grew old in the progress of these terrible years, and the proud Miss Penton, the handsome, stately young woman, who looked, the neighbors said, "as if all the world belonged to her," grew old too, before her time, and changed and paled, and turned to stone. Not that her heart was turned to stone -on the contrary, it was a fountain of tears; it was a well of tenderness unfailing; it was the heart of a mother, concentrated upon those objects of her love for whom she could do nothing, who were perishing before her eyes. The Pentons were proud people, and they kept up appearances; they entertained more or less, whatever happened. They had parties of visitors in their house; they kept up the oldfashioned hospitality, and all that their position exacted, and never betrayed to the world the agonized watch they were keeping, as from a watch-tower, upon the proceedings of the young men who would have none of their counsel, and who returned more and more rarely, and then only when help, or nursing, or succor of some sort was wanted, to their home. Latterly, under the excuse of Sir Walter's health, there was a certain withdrawal from the world, and the father and daughter accomplished their miserable vigil with less intrusion of a watchful neighborhood. First Reginald and then Walter came home to die. Death is kind; he sheds a light upon the wasted face even when it is sin that has wasted it, and wrings the heart of the watchers with looks purified by pain, that remind them how the sinner was once an innocent child. Through all this the father and daughter went together, leaning upon each other, yet even to each other saying but little. They were as one in their anguish, in their lingering hopes, in the long vigils by these sick-beds, in the unutterable pangs of seeing one after another die. Ten years is a long time when it is thus told out in misery and pain. Alicia Penton was a

woman of thirty five when she walked behind the come of her last brother to the family burying-ground. She was chief mourner, as she had been chief nurse and chief sufferer all through, for Sir Walter had broken down altogether at

the death-bed of his last boy.

This double tragedy passed over with little revelation to the outside world. Everybody, indeed, knew what lives the young men had lived, and how they had died. And people pitied the father to whom it must be, they felt, so great a disappointment that his baronetcy and his old lands should go out of the family, and that in the direct line he should have no heir. If only one of them had married, if there had been but a child to carry on the family, the kind neighbors said. It was thought that Sir Walter was far more proud than tender, and that this would be his view. As for Miss Penton, it was believed that she must find great consolation in the fact that her position and her importance would be so much increased. A few years quiet (such as was inevitable in their deep mourning) would make up for all the sacrifices Sir Walter had made for the boys; and then Alicia would be a great heiress, notwithstanding that a considerable portion of the estate was entailed. People thought that when she realized this, Alicia Penton would dry her tears.

She did not in any case make very much show of her tears. Her father and she went on living in the great, silent house, where now there was not even an echo to be listened for, a piece of evil news to be apprehended; where all was silent, silent as the grave. She had been courted as much as most women in her younger days; she had been loved, but she had listened to no one. Her youth had glided away under the shadow of calamity, the shadow which had stolen away all beauty and freshness from her and made her old before her time, and, lest they should express too much, had turned her features to stone. She had always been stately, but she was stern now that all was over, and there was neither terror for the future nor

sound of the present to keep her tortured heart alive.

But naturally, after awhile, these intense emotions, which no one suspected, were calmed, and life began again. Life began even for Sir Walter, who was nearly seventy, much more for his daughter, who was thirty-five. They could not die, nor could they darken their windows and

shot out the sunshine forever because two poor wrecks, two ismal, ruined lives, had come to an end. It must be such a relief, people said, even though no doubt it was a grief in its way. And though the ending of anxiety in such a way seems almost an additional pang, an additional loss to obstinate love, yet after all it is a dismal relief in its blank and stillness. And life had to be carried on. When Miss Penton, Sir Walter's only child and heiress, came out of her long seclusion there were still men to be found who admired, or said they admired her, and who were very eager to place themselves at her disposal. Among these was Gerald Russell, a man who had once been kind to one of "the boys," and who was known as the most good-natured, the least exacting of men. He was poor; he had no particular standing of his own to confuse the family arrangements: and the two liked each other. Truly and honestly they liked each other; he had been almost a suitor of her youth, kept back, both of them were willing to believe, by his poverty. Gerald Russell was not unaware that there would be sacrifices to make, that he was accepting a position not without drawbacks, in which, indeed, there might possibly be a good deal to bear. But he had not made much of his life hitherto, and he made up his mind to risk it. And they married, and he was not unhappy. This was the present position of affairs. He was not unhappy, and she was more nearly happy than she could have been had he not been there. Had "anything happened," as the phrase goes, to him—that is, had he died the world would have become blank to Alicia. Had she been the victim Mr. Russell Penton would have been truly grieved, and would have mourned honestly for his wife, but the sense of freedom might perhaps have been something of a compensation to him. Thus they were not equal any more than two human creatures ever are equal. She seemed to have the best of it upon the surface of affairs. She was the head of the house. Both without and within she was the pivot upon which everything turned, and he was by no means of equal importance; but yet he would have been to her a greater less than she to him, which perhaps made the balance equal once more.

He returned to that question about the tapestry when they set out, as was their custom in the afternoon, to take a walk together. They went through the wood which cov-

ered the crest of the high river-bank upon which Penton stood, and which defended the house from the north. Everything, it is needless to say, was beautifully kept, the woodland paths just wild enough to preserve an aspect of nature amid the perfection of foresting and landscape gardening on the largest scale. Wherever there was a point of view the openings were skillfully arranged so as to get its finest aspect, and the broad valley, or rather plain, stretched out below with village-spires and scattered clusters of houses, and a red-roofed town in the distance, with a light veil of smoke hanging between it and the sky. The river flowed full and strong in its winter volume at their feet, reflecting the gray blueness of the heavens, the deeper colors that began to blaze about the west, and the gray whiteness of the vapors overhead. It was when they had turned, after a momentary pause at one of these mounts of vision, that Russell Penton turned suddenly to his wife with a smile.

"Did you send for the man from the Gobelins?" he said.

"Yes. What put that into your mind now?"

"Nothing; the chimneys at Penton Hook," he replied.

"And why the chimneys at Penton Hook? Your mind jumps from one subject to the other in the strangest way. What connection can there be between two things so unlike?"

"Nothing," he said, with a faint laugh; "and yet perhaps more than meets the eye. There is no great volume of smoke rising from those chimneys. A faint blue streak or so and that is all. It does not look like fire in every room or a jolly blaze in the kitchen."

"What are you aiming at, Gerald? I think you mean mischief. No; probably they have not fires in all the rooms; but what has that to do with us or with the man

from Paris? I don't follow you," she said.

"My dear Alicia, what does it matter? My ways of thinking are jerky, you are aware. If you had as many children as poor Mrs. Penton you would have fires in all the rooms."

"Ah! if—" she said, with a sigh; then, in a tone of impatience, "Poor Mrs. Penton, as you call her, and I—would probably not in any circumstances act in the same way."

"No, because you are rich Mrs. Penton, my dear. I think you were a little hard upon them, upon the duty of

keeping within your income, and all that. I dare say the children have blue little hands and cold noses. If they were mine they should have fires in their rooms whatever my income might be."

'They would have nothing of the sort—that is, if I were your wife, Gerald," said Mrs. Penton, with composure. She made a little pause, and then added, with a momentarily quickened breath, "Perhaps under these circum-

stances I might not have been so."

He felt the blow; it was a just one, if not perhaps very generous. And if he had been a man of hot temper, or of very sensitive feelings, it would have wounded him. But he was pacific and middle-aged, and knew the absolute inutility of any quarrel. So he answered quietly, "As I can not conceive myself with any other wife in any circumstances, that is not a possibility we need consider."

Mrs. Penton's mind went quickly, though her aspect was rigid. She had begged his pardon before these words were half said, with a quick rising color, which showed her shame

of the suggestion she had made.

"I was wrong to say it; yet not wrong in what I said. If you had been a poor man, Gerald, your wife would have

known how to cut her coat according to her cloth."

"You mean if she had not been a rich woman. It is ill judging, they say in Scotland, between a full man and a fasting. I have a proverb, you see, as well as you. You were quite right, my dear, to send for that man from the Gobelins; but I would say nothing about my poor neighbors and the coat that is not cut according to the cloth."

"If you think I am wrong you should say so plainly,. Gerald.' The color still wavered a little upon her cheek She was perhaps not so patient even of implied blame as she thought she was. "It is perhaps wrong," she added, quickly, "but I should not wonder if I shared without knowing it my father's feeling about the heir. Oh, you need not say anything; I know it is unreasonable. It is not Edward Penton's fault that he is the next in the entail. But human creatures are not always reasonable, and they say no man likes to be haunted with the sight of his heir." "Poor heir!" said Russell Penton, very softly, almost

under his breath.

"Poor heir? I should say poor possessor, poor old man, who must see his home go into the hands of a stranger!" They had come to another point where their accustomed feet paused, where the bare winter boughs, with all their naked tracery, framed in a wide opening of sky and cloud and plain, and where once more those clustered chimneys of Penton Hook, with their thin curls of smoke, seemed to thrust themselves into the front of the landscape. The house lay almost at the gazers' feet, framed in with a cluster of trees, encircled with a glowing sweep of the stream, which looked like a ribbon of light full of shimmering color, round the brown settlement of the half-seen building and wintery branches. Mrs. Penton clasped her hands together with a sudden quick suppressed movement of strong feeling, and turned hastily away.

STREET OF SER SIGN CHAPTER III. of Thom, tell Tevo

PENTON HOOK.

Soon after the day when this discussion was carried on among the woods of Penton over their heads, the family at Penton Hook were holding a sort of committee of ways and means in their damp domain below. The winter afternoon was clear and bright, and the river ran in deceitful brightness round the half-circle of the little promontory. It was not of itself at all a disagreeable house. If it had not been that the mud and wetness of the garden paths, where the water seemed to well up even through the gravel, made every footstep mark the too bright blue and brown ties in the hall, and gave it a sloppy and disorderly look, the entrance itself might have been pretty enough; but there had been no attempt made to furnish or utilize it, and there were tracks of glistening steps across it in different directions to the different doors, all of which opened out of the hall. And the drawing-room was a well-sized, well-shaped room, with three or four windows; a room of which, with a little money and taste, something very pretty might have been made. But the windows were turned to the north, and the furniture was bare and worn; the walls and the carpets and curtains had all alike faded into a color which can only be described as being the color of poverty. The pattern was worn and trodden out upon the carpet; it was blurred and dull upon the walls-everything was of a brownish, greenish, grayish, indescribable hue. The pict-

ures on the walls seemed to have grown gray, too, being chiefly prints, which ran into the tone of the whole. The table at which Mrs. Penton (poor Mrs. Penton) sat with her work was covered with a woolen cover, the ground of which had been red with a yellow pattern; but it (perhaps mercifully) had faded, too. And as for the lady, she was faded like everything else. Her dress, like the room, had sunk into the color of poverty. There was nothing about her that was above the level of matter-of-fact dullness. She was darning stockings, and they were also indefinite in hue. Her hair, which had been yellow or very light brown, had lost its gloss and sheen. It was knotted behind in a loose knot, and might have been classical and graceful had it not suggested that this was the easiest way possible to dispose of those abundant locks. Her head was stooped over her work; her basket on the table was overflowing. She paused now and then, and looked up to make her observation when it was her turn, but not even for the sake of the family consultation could she intermit her necessary work. Nine pairs of stockings, not to speak of her own, are a great deal for a woman to keep in order. Her own were not much worn, for she walked very little. She was one of those women who are indolent by nature, yet always busy. Once seated at her work, stocking after stocking went through her hands, and holes as big as a half-moon got deftly, swiftly, silently filled up; but it cost her an effort to rise from her seat to go about her domestic business. She was indolent in movement, though so industrious; a piece of still life, though her hands were never idle. This was the kind of woman to whom, in his maturer judgment, the man who had once been Alicia Penton's adorer had turned. It is secret as

He was not far from her, seated in an elbow-chair, not an easy-chair, but an old-fashioned mahogany article with arms, upon which he reposed his elbows. His hands were clasped in front of him, and now and then, when he forgot himself, he twirled his thumbs. He bore a family likeness to Sir Walter Penton, having a high nose and long face; but he was not the same kind of man. Old Sir Walter at nearly eighty was firm and erect still, but Edward Penton was limp. He was prone to tumble down upon himself, so to speak, like a crumbling wall; to go sinking, telescoping into himself like a slippery mass of sand or clay. There

was an anxious look in his countenance, contradicting the pretensions of that prominent feature, the nose, which looked aristocratic, his family thought, and did its best to look strong. It was the mouth that did it, some people thought, a mouth which was manifestly weak, with all kinds of uncompleted piteous curves about it, and dubious wavering lines. His lower lip would move vaguely from time to time, as though he were repeating something. He was dressed in knickerbockers and gaiters and a rough coat, as if he had a great deal to do out-of-doors. He might have been a gentleman farmer, or a squire with an estate to look after, or even a gamekeeper of a superior kind; but he was nothing of all these. He was only a man who lived in the country, and had nothing to do, and had to walk

about, as it were, for daily bread.

On the corner of the table, not far from Mrs. Penton, sat, with his legs swinging loosely, a younger, a quite young man; indeed, poor Wat did not know that he was a man at all, or realize what he was coming to. He was the eldest That did not seem to say very much, considering the character of the house, and the manner of life pursued in it, but it sounded a great deal to them, for young Walter was the heir intail male. He was the representative of all the Pentons, the future head of the family. He thought a great deal of his position, and so did the family. In time Penton would be his, the stately old house, and the title would be his which his ancestors had borne. The young man felt himself marked out from his kind by this inheritance. He was humble enough at present, but he had only to go on living, to wait and keep quiet, and he must be Sir Walter Penton of Penton in the end. He felt a greater confidence in this than his father did who came before him. Mr. Penton did not look forward to the baronetcy for his part with much enthusiasm. It did not rouse him from his habitual depression. Perhaps because care was so close and so constant, perhaps because he had come to an age which expects but little from any change. He did not feel that to become Sir Edward would do much for him, but even he felt that for Wat it was a great thing.

The other two people in the room were the two girls; that was all that anybody ever said of them. They were searcely even distinguished by name the one from the other; you could scarcely say they were individuals at all; they

were the two girls. The children were apt to run their two names into one, and call them indiscriminately-Ally-Anne. Whether it was Ally or whether it was Anne who came first did not matter, it was a generic title which belonged to both. And yet they were not like each other. Ally had been called Alicia, after her relation at Penton, who was also her godmother, but at Penton Hook life was too full for so many syllables. They never got further than Alice in the most formal moments, and Ally was the name for common wear. Anne bore her mother's name, but Mrs. Penton was Annie, whereas the girl preferred the one tiny syllable which expressed her better; for Anne, though she was the youngest, had more fiber in her than all the rest put together; but description is vain in face of such a little person. Her sister, though the eldest, was the shadow and she the substance, and no doubt it was one of the subtle but unconscious discriminations of character which the most simple make unawares, which led the little ones to call whichever individual of this pair appeared by the joint name. Mount viev vas of mees don bib isill

"I shall always say, Edward, that you ought to have your share now," said Mrs. Penton in a soft, even voice, never lifting her eyes from her work, but going on steadily like a purling stream; "you have more to do with it than Mr. Russell Penton, who never can succeed to anything; you ought to have your allowance like any other heir."

"I don't know why I should have an allowance," said Mr. Penton, with a voice in which there was a certain languid irritation; "I have always held my own, and I shall always hold my own. And besides, Sir Walter does not want me to have the land; he would rather a great deal that it went to—Russell Penton, as you call him, though he has no right to our name."

"But that can't be," cried young Wat, " seeing that I-

I mean you, father, are the heir of entail."

"It might be," said Mr. Penton, going on with his tone of subdued annoyance, "if the law was changed; and one never knows in these revolutionary times how soon the law might be changed. It has been threatened to be done as long as I can remember. Primogeniture and the law of entail have been in every agitator's mouth; they think it would be a boon to the working-man."

"How could it be a boon to the working-man? What

have we got to do with the working-man? What does it matter to him who has the property? it could not come to him anyhow," cried Wat, with great energy, coloring high, and swinging his legs more than ever in the vehemence of personal feeling. It is all very well to talk of political principles, but when the question involves one's self and one's own position in the world, the argument is very much more urgent and moving. Young Walter was rather a revolutionary in his own way; he was of the class of generous aristocrats who take a great interest in the workingman; but there is reason in all things, and he did not see what this personage had to do with his affairs.

"Oh, I don't know, there is no telling; they might be made to think it would do them good somehow. It has always been a favorite thing to say. At all events, you know," Mr. Penton continued, with his mild disgust of everything, "it could not do them any harm. Primogeniture has always been a sort of thing that makes some people foam at the mouth."

"My dear Edward!" cried Mrs. Penton; she almost looked up from her work, which was a great thing to say; and when this mild woman said, "My dear Edward," it was the same thing as when a man says "By Jove," or "By George." In the gentle level of her conversation it counted as a sort of innocent oath. "My dear Edward! how could they abolish primogeniture? which so far as I know is just the Latin way of saying that one of your children is born before the other. Isn't it, Wat? Well, I always thought so. The Radicals may get to be very powerful, but they can't make you have your children all in a heap at the same time."

"But they can made it of no importance which is born first; that is what it means," said Mr. Penton. "They would have the children all equal, just the same; whether it is little Horry or Wat there who thinks himself such a great man."

"Well, so they are all the same," said the mother, a little bewildered. "I often wonder how it is that people can make favorites, for I am sure I could not say, for my part, which of them all I liked best. I like them all best—Horry because he is the littlest, and Wat because he is the biggest, and all the rest of them for some other reason, or

just for no reason at all. And so, I am sure, Edward, do you."

"In that way Wat would be no better than any of the

rest," said Anne.

"I should have no call to do anything for you," said the young man, with an uncomfortable laugh. "It would be every one for himself. There would be no bother about little sisters or brothers either. On the whole, it would be rather a good bargain, don't you think so, mother? Horry and the others must all shift for themselves when there is no eldest son—"

This time Mrs. Penton really did lift her soft eyes. "Don't say such wicked things!" she said; "it is going against Scripture. As if anything could change you from being the eldest son! Who should look after the children if your father and I were to die? Oh, Wat! how can you speak so?—when it is just my comfort, knowing how uncertain life is, that the eldest is grown up, and that there would be some one to take our place, and take care of all

these little things!"

Mrs. Penton had no mind for politics, as will be perceived, but the vision of the little orphans without an elder brother struck her imagination. This picture of unnatural desolation brought the tears warm to her eyes. She took another view of promogeniture from that which is familiar to discussion, and it was some time before they could explain it to her and get her calmed and soothed. Indeed, as to explaining it, that was never accomplished; but when she fully knew that her first-born did not cast off all responsibility in respect to little Horry she was calm.

"I don't pretend to understand politics," she said, with great truth, "but I know nature," which perhaps was not

quite so true.

Mr. Penton was not at all moved by this little digression, he took no notice of the argument between the mother and the children. He was a man who inclined to the opinion that things were badly managed in this world, and that those who meant to do well had generally a hard fight. He thought that on the whole the worst people had the best of it, and that a man like himself, struggling to do as well as he could for his children, and to live as well as he could, and do his duty generally, was surrounded by hinderances and drawbacks which never came in the way of less scrup-

ulous people. Such an opinion as this often fills a man with indignation and something like rage, but it did not have this effect upon Mr. Penton. It gave him a general sense of discouragement, a feeling that everything was sure to go against him; but it did not make him angry. Instead of pointing, as the Psalmist did, with wonder and indignation to the wicked who flourished like a green baytree, he was more disposed to regard this spectacle with a melancholy smile as the natural course of affairs. One might have known that was how it would be, his look said. And he was rather apt perhaps to identify himself as the righteous man who had no such good fortune to look for. He had followed his own train of thoughts while the others talked, and now he went on continuing the subject. "We never can tell," he said, "one day from another what changes may be made in the law. Sir Walter is an old man, and it doesn't seem as if there could be any changes in his time; but still a craze might get up, and the thing might be done all in a moment, which has been threatened ever since I can recollect. So I hope none of you will fill your heads with foolish thoughts of what may happen when Penton comes to me; for you see, for anything we know, it may never come to me at all."

Having said this, he ceased twirling his thumbs, and rising up slowly cast a glance about him as if looking for his hat. He never brought his hat into the drawing-room, yet he always did this, just as a dog will try to scrape a hole in a Turkey carpet; and then Mr. Penton said, as if it was quite a new idea, "I think I'll just take a little walk

before tea."

It was from an unusual quarter that the conversation was renewed. Ally, who was so like her mother, who had the same kind of light-brown hair shading her soft countenance, knotted low at the back of her head, the same fragile willowy figure and submissive ways, lifted up her head after the little pause that followed his exit, when they all instinctively listened, and followed him, so to speak, with their attention while he walked out of the house. Ally raised her head and asked, in a voice in which there was a little apprehension, "I wonder if father really thinks that; and what if it should come true!"

"Your father would not say it," Mrs. Penton replied, always careful to maintain her husband's credit, "unless

he thought it, in a kind of a way. But, for all that, perhaps it may never happen. Things take a long time to happen," she said, with unconscious philosophy. "We just worry ourselves looking for changes, and no change comes after all ?? olam don bib di dud imid damaga og od

"But such a thing might happen suddenly," said Wat, thinking it necessary, in his father's absence, to take up the serious side of the argument, "father is quite right in that. With all the extensions of the suffrage and that sort of thing, which you don't understand, Ally, a change in the law that has been long talked about might happen in a moment. It all depends upon what turn things may take."

Then we may never go to Penton at all," said Anne, jumping up and throwing her work into her mother's large basket. "I have always been frightened for Penton all my life. It's a horrid big chilly place that never would look like home. I like the little old Hook best, and I hope they will abolish primogeniture, or whatever you call it, and so Wat will have to do something and we shall all stay at home. You to enon equal to a doublest up I some to

"Anne! do you wish that your father should never come into his fortune," her mother said, in a reproachful tone, "when you know his heart is set upon it? I am frightened myself sometimes when I think of the change of living, and having to give dinner-parties and all that; but when I think that Edward has never yet been in his right element, that he has never had the position he ought to have had—ah! for that I could put up with anything," she said woldtil a saket taur Hadnilt I o

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It was from an anusual quarter that the conversation,

THE YOUNG PEOPLE.

THE young people at Penton Hook were good children on the whole. They respected their father and their mother, and though they did not always agree in every domestic decision, with that holy ignorance which distinguishes childhood, they were not much less docile than the little ones in respect to actual obedience. At seventeen and eighteen, much more at twenty, a young soul has begun to think a little and to judge, whether it reveals its judgment or not. Anne had her own opinions on every subject by

perversity of nature; and Wat, who was a man, and the heir, took on many points a very independent view, and could scarcely help thinking now and then that he knew better than his father. And even Ally, who was the quietest, the most disposed to yield her own way of thinking. still had a little way of her own, and felt that other ways of doing things might be adopted with advantage. They were great friends all three, each other's chief companions: and among themselves they talked very freely, seeing the mistakes that were being made about the other children, and very conscious of much that might have been done in their own individual cases. Wat, for example, had much to complain of in his own upbringing. He had been sent for a year or two to Eton, and much had been said about giving him the full advantage of what is supposed to be the best education. But it had been found after awhile that the infallible recurrence of the end of the half, and the bills that accompanied it, was a serious drawback, and the annoyance given by them so entirely outbalanced any sense of benefit received, that at sixteen he had been taken away from school under vague understandings that there was to be work at home to prepare him for the University. But the work at home had never come to much. Mr. Penton had believed that it would be a pleasant occupation for himself to rub up his Latin and Greek, and that he would be as good a coach as the boy could have. But his Latin and Greek wanted a great deal of rubbing up. The fashions of scholarship had changed since his day, and perhaps he had never been so good a scholar as he now imagined. And then it was inconceivable to Mr. Penton that regularity of hours was necessary in anything. He thought that a mere prejudice of school-masters. He would take Wat in the morning one day, then in the afternoon, then miss a day or two, and resume on the fifth or sixth after tea. What could the hours matter? It came about thus by degrees that the readings that were to fit the young man for matriculation failed altogether, and no more was said about the University. Wat had no very strong impulse to work in his own person, but when he came to be twenty and became aware that nothing further was likely to come of it, he felt that he had been neglected, and that so far as education was concerned he had not had justice done him. Had he been a very intellectual young man, or very energetic,

he would no doubt have been spurred by this neglect into greater personal effort, and done so much that his father would have been shamed or forced into taking further steps. But Wat was not of this noble sort. He was not fond of work; he had always seen his father idle; and it seemed to him natural. So that he, too, fell into the way of lounging about, and doing odd things, and taking the days as they came. They kept no horses, so he could not hunt. He had not even a gun, nothing better than an old one, which, now he was old enough to know better, he was ashamed to carry. So that those two natural occupations of the rural gentleman were denied to him. And it is not to be supposed that a boy could reach his twentieth year without feeling that an education of this kind-a non-education-had been a mistake. He knew that he was at a disadvantage among his fellow-boys or fellow-men. Whether he would have felt this as much had he been under no other disadvantages in respect to horses and guns and pocket-money, we do not venture to say; but, taking everything together, Wat could not but feel that he was manqué, capable of nothing, having no place among his kind. And if he felt doubly in consequence the importance of his heirship, and that Penton would set all right, who could blame him? It was the only possibility in that poor little dull horizon which at Penton Hook seemed to run into the flats of the level country, the mud and the mist, and the rising river, and the falling rain.

The girls had their little grievances, too, but felt Wat's grievance to be so much greater than theirs that they took up his cause vehemently, and threw all their indignation and the disapproval of their young intelligences into the weight of his. It was impossible that they could be as they were, young creatures full of life and active thought, without feeling what a mistake it all was, and how far the authorities of the family were wrong. They subjected, indeed, the decisions of the father and mother, but especially the father, as all our children do, to a keen and clearsighted inspection, seeing what was amiss much more clearly than the wisest of us are apt to do in our own case. A little child of ten will thus follow and judge a philosopher, perhaps unconsciously in most cases, without a word to express its condemnation. The young Pentons were not so silent. They spoke their mind, in the perfect confidence

of family intercourse, to their mother always, sometimes to their father too. And no doubt in pure logic, this criticism and disapproval should have dealt a great blow at the discipline of the house, and destroyed the principle of obedience. But fortunately logic is the last thing that affects the natural family life. Wat and Ally and Anne were in reality almost as obedient as were the little ones to whom the decisions of papa and mamma were as the law and the gospels. It had never occurred to them to raise any standard of rebellion; they did what they were told by sweet natural bonds of habit, by the fact that they had always done it, by the unbroken sentiment of filial subjection. The one thing did not seem to affect the other. It never occurred even to Wat to stop and argue the point with his father; he did what he was told, though afterward, when he came to think of it, he might think that his own

way would have been the most wise.

The conversation which is set down in the last chapter did not give any insight into the family controversy that had been going on-being only, as it were, the subsiding of the waves after that discussion had come to an end. The subject in question was one which greatly moved and excited all the young people. Oswald, the second boy, who came next in the family after Anne, was the genius of the house. He was not much more than fifteen, but he had already written many poems and other compositions which had filled the house with wonder. The girls were sure that in a few years Lord Tennyson himself would have to look to his laurels, and Mr. Ruskin to stand aside: for Oswald's gifts were manifold, and it was indifferent to him whether he struck the strings of poetry or the more sober chord of prose. Wat's fraternal admiration was equally genuine and more generous, for it is a little hard upon a big boy to recognize his younger brother's superiority; and it was dashed by a certain conviction that it would be for Osy's good to be taken down a little. But Wat as much as the girls was agitated by the question which had been, so to speak, before a committee of the whole house. It was a question of more importance at Penton Hook than the fate of the ministry or the elections, or anything that might be going on in Europe. It was the question whether Osy should be continued where he was, at Marlborough, or if his education should be suspended till "better times."

Behind this lay a darker and more dreadful suggestion, of which the family were vaguely conscious, but which did not come absolutely under discussion, and this was whether Osy's education should be stopped altogether, and an "opening in life" found for him. Nothing that had ever happened to them had moved the family so much as this question. The "better times" which the Pentons looked forward to could be nothing other than the death of Sir Walter and Mr. Penton's accession to the headship of the family; and it was in the lull of exhaustion that followed a long discussion that Mrs. Penton made her suggestion about the propriety of an allowance being made to her husband as the heir of the property, which had led him into the expression of those general but discouraging ideas about entails and primogeniture. It had not perhaps occurred to Mr. Penton before; but now he came to think of it it seemed just of a piece with the general course of affairs, and of everything that had happened to him in the past, that new laws should come in at the moment and deprive him in the future of the heirship of which he had been so

When Mr. Penton went out for his walk after the statement he had made of these possibilities, Wat and the girls went out too, on their usual afternoon expedition to the post. There was not very much to be done at Penton Hook, especially at this depressing time of the year when tennis was impracticable and the river not to be thought of. The only amusement possible was walking, and that is a pleasure which palls—above all when the roads are muddy and there is nowhere in particular to go to. It was Anne, in the force of her youthful invention, who had established the habit of going to the post. It was an "object," and made a walk into a sort of duty-not the mere meaningless stroll which, without this purpose, it would turn to; and though the correspondence of the household was not great, Anne also managed that there should always be something which demanded to be posted, and could not be delayed. When there was nothing else she would herself dash off a note to one of the many generous persons who advertise mysterious occupations by which ladies and other unemployed persons may earn an income without a knowledge of drawing or anything else in particular. Alas! Anne had answered so many of these advertisements that

she was no longer sanguine of getting a satisfactory reply; but if there was no letter to be sent off, nothing of her father's about business, no post-card concerning the groceries, or directions to the dress-maker, or faithful family report from Mrs. Penton to one of her relations, such as, amid all the occupations of her life, that dutiful woman sent regularly, Anne could always supply the necessary letter from her own resources. It was on a similar afternoon tothat on which the Pentons at the great house had discussed and thought of the poorer household; and a wintery sunset, very much the same as that on which Mr. Russell Penton and his wife had looked, shone in deep lines of crimson and gold, making of the river which reflected it a stream of flame, when the three young people, far too much absorbedin their own affairs to think of the colors in the sky or the reflections in the river, or anything but Osy and his prospects, and the state of the family finances, and the mistakes of family government, came down the hill from the level of the Penton woods toward their own home. The western sky, blazing with color, was on the left hand; but even the sky toward the north and east shared in the general illumination, and clouds all rose-tinted, concealing their heaviness in the flush of reflection, hung upon the chill blue, and seemed to warm the fresh wintery atmosphere before it sunk into the chill of night. The girls and their brother kept their heads together, speaking two at once in the eagerness of their feelings, and found no time for contemplation of what was going on overhead. A sunset is a thing which comes every evening, and about which there is no urgent reason for attention, as there was upon this question about Osy, which struck at the foundations of family credit and hope.

"When I left Eton," said Wat with melancholy candor—"I had not much sense, to be sure—it seemed rather fine coming away to work at home. Fellows thought I was going to work for something out of the common way. I liked it—on the whole. When you are at school there is always something jolly in the thought of coming home.

And so will Osy feel like me."

"But you were never clever, Wat," said the impetuous Anne.

This was perhaps a little hard to bear. "Clever is neither here nor there," said Wat with a little flush. "It

does not make much difference to your feelings; I suppose I can tell better how Osy will take it than one of you

girls."

"Oh no; for girls are more ambitious than boys, I mean boys that are just ordinary like the rest. And Osy is not like you. He is full of ambition, he wants to be something, to make a great name. I have the most sympathy with that. Ally and you," cried the girl with a toss of her head like a young colt, "you are the contented ones, you are so easily satisfied; but not Osy nor me."

"Contented is the best thing you can be," said gentle Ally. "What is there better than content? Whatever trouble people take, it is only in the hope of getting satis-

faction at the end."

"I wish I was contented," said Walter, "that is all you know. What have I got to be contented about? I have nothing to do; I have no prospects in particular, nothing to look forward to."

"Oh, Watty-Penton!"

"Penton is all very well: but how can we tell when Sir Walter may die? No, I don't want him to die," cried the young man. "I wish no harm to him nor to any man. I only say that because -- Of course, so long as Sir Walter lives Penton may be paradise, but it has nothing to say to us. And then, as father says, the law may be changed before that happens, or something else may come in the way. No, I don't know what can come in the way; for after Sir Walter, of course father is head of the family, and I am the eldest son." These words had a cheering effect upon the youth in spite of himself. He turned back to look up where the corner of the great house was visible amid the trees. The Pentons of the Hook knew all the spots where that view was to be had. He turned round to look at it, turning the girls with him, who were like two shadows. No prospects in particular! when there was that before his eyes, the house of his fathers, the house which he intended to transmit to his children! He drew a long breath which came from the very depths of his chest, a sigh of satisfaction yet of desire—of a feeling too deep to get into words. "I say, what a sunset!" he cried, by way of diverting the general attention from this subject, upon which he did not feel able to express himself more clearly.

They all looked for the first time at the grand operation

of nature which was going on in the western sky. The heavens were all aglow with lines of crimson and purple, the blue spaces of the great vault above retiring in light ineffable far beyond the masses of cloud, which took on every tinge of color, preserving their own high purity and charms of infinitude. The great plain below lay silent underneath like a breathless spectator of that great, everrecurring drama, the river gathering up fragments of the glory and flashing back an answer here and there in its windings wherever it was clear of the earthly obstructions of high banks and trees. Something of the same radiance flashed in miniature from the young eyes that with one accord turned and looked-but for a moment and no more. They noted the sunset in a parenthesis, by a momentary inference; what they had sought was Penton, with all its human interests. And then they turned again and faced the north, where lay their poor little hom and the lowliness of the present, to which neither the su set nor any other glory lent a charm.
"You are the eldest son," said Anne, resuming without

a pause; "that's all about it. That makes everything different. Suppose it is right-or at least not wrong-for you to loaf about. But Osy hasn't got Penton; he has got to make himself a name. If he is stopped in his education, what is he to do? You ought to speak to father; we all ought to make a stand. If Osy is stopped in his educa-

tion it is quite different. What is he to do?"

"Father would never stop his education if he could afford it. It is the money. If we could only give up something. But what is there we can give up? Sugar and butter count for so little," said Ally, in soft tones of despair.

"I should not mind," said Anne, "if we did not get anything new for years."

"We so seldom have anything new," her sister said, with a sigh; there was so little to economize in this way. All the savings they could think of would not make up half the sum that had to be paid for Osy. Their young spirits were crushed under this thought. What could they do? The girls, as has been said, had answered a great many of those advertisements which offer occupation to ladies; they had tried to make beaded lace and to paint Christmas cards. Alas! that, like the butter and sugar, counted for so little. They might as well try to make use of the colors of the

sunset as to make up Osy's schooling in that way: and Wat was even more helpless than they. It was so discouraging a prospect that no one could say a word. They walked down with their faces to the grayness and dimness from whence night was coming, and their hopes, like the light, seemed to be dying away.

It was Anne, always the most quick to note everything that happened, who broke the silence. "What is that," she cried, "at our door? Look there, wheeling in just

under the lime-trees!"

"A carriage! Who can it be?"

"The Penton carriage! Don't you see the two bays? Something must be up!" cried Walter, a flash of keen curiosity kindling in his eyes.

They stopped for a moment and looked at each other

with a sudden thrill of expectation.

"No one has been to see us from Penton for years and years."

"The carriage would not come for nothing!" "It has been sent perhaps to fetch father!"

They hurried down with one accord, full of excitement and wonder and awe. coupe and mi bequote at all the couple a floated extent of the residual of the couple at the couple

A WINTER'S WALK.

Mr. Penton went out to take his walk in a depressed mood. He was familiar with all the stages of depression. He was a man who thought he had been hardly dealt with in the course of his life. In his youth there had been a momentary blaze of gayety and pleasure. In those days, when he had shared the early follies of Walter and Reginald, and fallen in love with Alicia, it had not occurred to him that the path of existence would be a dull one. But that was all over long ago. When the other young men had fallen into dissipation and all its attendant miseries, he had pulled himself up. Pleasure was all very well, but he had no idea of paying such a price for it as that. He was not a man who had ever been brought under any strong religious impulse, but he knew the difference between right and wrong. He pulled himself up with great resolution, and abandoned the flowery path where all the thorns are at

first hidden under the bloom and brightness. It was no small sacrifice to descend into the gray mediocrity of Penton Hook, and give himself up to the dull life which was all that was possible; but he did it, which was not an easy thing to do. It was true that he was still in those days a young man, and might have made something better of his existence; but he had no training of any special kind, no habit of work, no great capacity one way or other. He settled down to his dull country life without any feeling that he could do better, leaving all excitement behind him. It was perhaps a more creditable thing to do than if he had been able to plunge into another kind of excitement, to face the world and carve a fortune out of it, which is the alternative possible to some men. And as there had been no illusion possible when he accepted that neutral-tinted life, so there had been no unexpected happiness involved in its results. He had married a good woman, but not a lively one. His children had been pleasant and amusing in their babyhood, but they had brought innumerable cares along with them. Before their advent Penton Hook had been dull, but it had not been without many little comforts. He had been able to keep a couple of horses, which of itself was a considerable thing, and to hold his place more or less among the county people. But as the young ones grew it made a great difference. Just at the time when life ought to have opened up for their advantage, it had to be narrowed and straitened. He was compelled to give up his own gratifications on their account, yet without any compensating consciousness that he was doing the best he could for them. Indeed, there seemed no possibility of doing the best that could be done for any one. To keep on, to do what was indispensable, to provide food and clothing-the mere sordid necessities of life—was all that was within his power. In the early days after his marriage nothing had been saved; the necessity of education and provision for the children seemed either ludicrous in presence of the tiny creatures who wanted nothing but bread and milk and kisses, or so far off as to be beyond calculation. But by gradual degrees this necessity had become the most important of all. And with it, unfortunately, had come that depreciation in the value of land which made his little estate much less productive exactly at the time when he wanted money most.

One of his farms was vacant, the others were let at low rents-all was sinking into a different level. And, on the other hand, the wants of the family increased every day. It is not to be supposed that Mr. Penton liked to take Osy from school. He had been indifferent about Wat for various reasons, first because he then quite believed that he was really capable of "reading" with his boy, and would rather like it than otherwise, and then it would be a good thing for them both; and second, because Wat was the heir, and no great education is necessary (Mr. Penton thought with Mrs. Hardcastle in the play) to fit a man to spend a large income. But with Osy no such argument told. Osy was heir to nothing. He was the clever one of the family; and as for reading with Osy, his father knew that he was not capable of any such feat, even if he had not proved that to keep settled hours and give up a part of his day to his son's instruction had come to be a thing impossible to him. He knew very well now that to take Oswald from school would be to do him an injury. But what could the poor man do? All that the young ones said in their warm partisanship for Osy, in their indignation at the idea of making him suffer, had more or less affected their father. He was not very sensitive to anything they could say, and yet it wounded him in a dull way. It made him a little more depressed and despondent. To battle with the waves, to be tossed upon a great billow which may swallow you up, yet may also throw your ashore and bring you to a footing upon the solid earth, is less terrible than just to keep your head above the muddy tide which sucks you down and carries you on, with no prospect but to go to the bottom at last when your powers of endurance are spent. This last was Mr. Penton's state. There was no excitement of a storm, no lively stir of winds and watersall was dull, dreary, hopeless; a position in which he could do nothing to help himself, nothing to save himself-in which he must just go on, keeping his head above water as he could, now and then going down, getting his eyes and throat full of the heavy, muddy, livid stream. Poverty is little to the active soul which can struggle and strive and outwit it, which can still be doing; but to those who have nothing they can do, who can only wait speechless till they are ingulfed, how bitter is that slowly mounting, colorless, hopeless, all-subduing tide!

There was very little for a man to do at Penton Hook. He had tramped about the fields of the vacant farm, trying helplessly to look after things which he did not understand, and to make the fallow fields bear crops by looking at them, in the morning; and he had come away from them more depressed than ever, wondering whether, if he could get money enough to start and work the farm anything might be made of it; then reflecting dolefully that in all likelihood the money for such operations, even if he could raise it, might in all probability be as well thrown into the river for any good it would do. In the afternoon he did not attempt any further consideration of this question, but simply took a walk as he had been in the habit of doing for so many years. And though in some circumstances there are few things so pleasant, yet in others there is nothing so doleful as this operation of taking a walk. How much helpless idleness, how many hopeless self-questions, miserable musings, are summed up in it; what a dreamy commonplace it turns to, the sick soul's dull substitute for something to do or think of. It was in its way a sort of epitome of Edward Penton's wearisome life. He knew every turning of the road; there was nothing unexpected to look forward to, no novelty, no incident; when he met any one he knew, any of his equals, they were most probably riding or driving, or returning from a day with the hounds, splashed and tired, and full of talk about the run. He took off his hat to the county ladies as they drove past, and exchanged a word with the men. He had nothing to say to them nor they to him. He was of their sphere indeed, but not in it. He knew when he had passed that they would say "Poor Penton!" to each other, and discuss his circumstances. He was happier when he came now and then upon a solitary poor man breaking stones on the way, with whom he would stop and have a talk about the weather or how the country was looking. When he could find twopence in his pocket to give for a glass of beer he was momentarily cheered by the encounter. It was a cheap pleasure, and almost his only one. It gave a little relief to the dullness and discouragement which filled all the rest of the way.

There was, however, one incident in his walk besides the twopence to the stone-breaker. There was no novelty in this. Every day as he came up to the turning he knew

what awaited him; but that did not take away from its perennial interest. This incident was Penton, seen in the distance; not the terrace front, which he, like all the Pentons, thought a monument of architectural art, but a high shoulder of red masonry, which shone through the trees, and suggested all the rest to his accustomed eyes. Penton was the one incident in his walk, as it was in his life. He was poor, and the waters of misery were almost going over his head. Yet Penton stood fast, and he was the heir. He had said this to himself for years, and though the words might have worn out all their meaning, so often had they been repeated, yet there was an endless excitement in them. Twenty years before he had said them with a sense of mingled exultation and remorse, which was when the last of "the boys" died, and he became against all possibility the next heir. Sir Walter had been an old man then, and it seemed probable that these recurring calamities would end his life as well as his hopes. Edward Penton had nothing to reproach himself with; he had never been hard upon his cousins, though he had abandoned their evil ways, and he had been shocked and sorry when one by one they died. But afterward he had looked forward to his inheritance; he had believed that it could not be far off. He had come to this turning when first he began to feel life too many for him, and had looked at the house that was to be his and had taken comfort. But twenty years is a long time, and waiting for dead men's shoes is not a pleasant occupation. He looked at Penton now always with excitement, but without any exhilaration of hope. It did not seem so unlikely as before that Sir Walter might live to be a hundred; that he might live to see his younger cousin out. As he had outlived his own sons he might outlive Edward Penton and his sons after him. Nothing seemed impossible to such an old man. And Mr. Penton did not feel that his own powers of living, any more than any other powers in him, were much to be reckoned upon. He stood on this particular day and gazed at the house of his fathers with a long and wistful look. Should he ever step into it as his own? Should he ever change his narrow state for the lordship there? This question did not bring to him the same quickening of the breath which he had been sensible of on so many previous occasions. He was too much depressed to-day to be roused even by that. He turned

away with a sigh, and turned his back to that vision and his face homeward. At home all his cares were awaiting him—as if he had not carried them with him every step of

the way.

As he walked back toward Penton Hook his ear was caught by the chip of the hammer, which sounded in the stillness of the wintery afternoon like some big insect on the road. Chip, chip, and then the little roll of falling stones. The man who made the sound was sitting on a heap of stones by the road-side, working very tranquilly, not hurrying himself, taking his occupation easily. He was grayhaired, with a picturesque gray beard, and a red handkerchief knotted underneath. He paused to put his hand to his cap when he saw Mr. Penton. The recollection of past glasses of beer, or hopes for the future, or perhaps the social pleasure, independent of all interested motives, of five minutes' talk to break the dullness of the long afternoon, made the approach of the wayfarer pleasant.

"Good-afternoon, sir," he said, cheerfully.

Old Crockford, though he was a great deal older than Mr. Penton, and much poorer absolutely, though not comparatively, was by no means a depressed person, but regarded everything from a cheerful point of view.

"Good-morning, Crockford," said Mr. Penton. "I didn't see you when I passed a little while ago. I thought

you had not been out to-day."

"Bless you, squire, I'm out most days," said Crockford; weather like this it's nothin but pleasure. But frost and cold is disagreeable, and rain's worst of all. I'm all right as long as there's a bit o' sunshine, and it keeps up."

"It looks like keeping up, or I am no judge," said the

poor squire.

Crockford shook his head and looked up at the sky. "I don't like the look of them clouds," he said. "When they rolls up like that, one on another, I never likes the look on them. But, praise the Lord, we's high and dry, and can't come to no harm."

"It is more than I am," said Mr. Penton, testily. "I

hate rain!"

"And when the river's up it's in of the house, sir, I've heard say? That's miserable, that is. When the children were young my missis and me we lived down by Pepper's

Wharf, and the fevers as them little ones had, and the coughs and sneezin's, and the rheumatics, it's more nor tongue can say. Your young ladies, squire, is wonderful red in the face and straight on their pins to be living alongside of the river. It's an onpleasant neighbor is the river,

'I always do say.''

"If you hear any fools saying that the water comes into my house you have my permission to—stop them,' said Mr. Penton, angrily. "It's no such thing; the water never comes higher than the terrace. As for fevers, we don't know what they are. But I don't like the damp in my garden; that stands to reason. It spoils all the paths and washes the gravel away."

"That's very true," said Crockford, with conviction; it leaves 'em slimy, whatever you do. I've seen a sight to-day as has set me thinking, though I'm but a poor chap. Poor men, like others, they 'as their feelings. I've seen a lady go by, squire, as may be once upon a day years ago, you, or most of the gentlemen about—for she was a hand-some one, she was—"

"Ah, an old beauty! 'Even in our ashes live their

wonted fires.' And who might this lady be?"

"Many a one was sweet upon her," said Crockford. "I ain't seen her, not to call seeing, for many a year. I don't know about ashes, squire, except as they're useful for scouring. And they say that beauty is but skin deep: but when I looks at an 'andsome lady I don't think nothing of all that."

"I didn't know you were such an enthusiast, Crock-

"I don't always understand, squire," said Crockford, "the words the quality employ. Now and then they'll have a kind of Greek or Latin that means just a simple thing. But I sits here hours on end, and I thinks a deal; and for a thing that pleases the eye I don't think there's nothing more satisfying than an 'andsome woman. I don't say in my own class of life, for they ages fast, do the women; they don't keep their appearance like you and me, if I may make so bold. But for a lady as has gone through a deal, and kep' her looks, and got an air with her, that goes with riding in her own carriage behind a couple of 'andsome bays-I will say, squire, if I was to be had up before the magistrates for it—and you're one yourself, and ought to know—and what I say is this: that Miss Aliciar from the great house there is just as fine a sight as a man would

wish to see."
"Miss Alicia!" cried poor Penton. The name was one he had not heard for long, and it seemed to bring back a flush of his youth which for a moment dazzled him. He burst out into a tremendous laugh after awhile. 'You old blockhead!" he said. "You're talking of Mrs. Russell Penton, my cousin, who hasn't been called by that name

these twenty years!" said old Crockford, "is nothin, squire, to a man like me. I knew her a baby, just as I knowed you. You're both two infants to the likes of me. Bless you, I hear the bells ring for her christening and yours too. But she's a fine, 'andsome woman, a-wheelin' along in her carriage as if all the world belonged to her. I don't think nothin' of a husband that hain't even a name of his own to bless himself with nor a penny to spend. It's you and her that should have made a match; that's what ought to have been, squire. 'I have your

"Unfortunately, you see," said Mr. Penton, "I have

got a wife of my own." and and bets redilled villaubers doudy

"But you hadn't no wife nor her a husband in the old days," said Crockford, meditatively, pausing to emphasize his words with the chip, chip of his hammer. "Dear a me! the mistakes that are in this life! One like me, as sits here hours on end, with naught afore him but the clouds flying and the wind blowing, learns a many things. There's more mistakes than aught else in this life. Going downright wrong makes a deal of trouble, but mistakes makes more. For one as goes wrong there's allays two or three decent folks as suffers. But mistakes is just like daily bread; they're like the poor as is ever with us, accordin' to the Scripture; they just makes a muddle of everything. It's been going through my mind since ever I see Miss Aliciar in her chariot a-driving away, as fine as King Solomon in all his glory. The two young gentlemen, that was a sad sort of a thing, squire, but I don't know as t'other is much better, the mistakes as some folks do make."

"Crockford, you are growing old, and fond of talking," said Mr. Penton, who had heard him out with a sort of angry patience. "Because one lets you go on and say your say, that's not to make you a judge of your betters. Look

here, here's twopence for a glass of beer, but mind you

keep your wisdom to yourself another day."

"Thank ye, squire," said Crockford. "I speak my "Thank ye, squire," said Crockford. "I speak my mind in a general way, but I can hold my tongue as well as another when it ain't liked. Remarks as is unpleasant,

or as pricks like, going too near a sore place-"

"Oh, confound you!" said the squire; "who ever said there was a-" But then he remembered that to quarrel with Crockford was not a thing to be done. "I think, after all," he said, "you're right, and that those clouds are banking up for rain. You'd better pack up your hammer, it's four o'clock, and it will be wet before you get home."

"Well, squire, if you says so, as is one of the trustees," said Crockford, giving an eye to the clouds, as he swung himself leisurely off his hard and slippery seat upon the heap of stones-"I'll take your advice, sir, and thank ye, sir; and

wishing you a pleasant walk afore the rain comes on."

Mr. Penton waved his hand and continued his walk downhill toward his home. The clouds were gathering indeed, but they were full of color and reflection, which showed all the more gorgeous against the rolling background of vapor which gradually obliterated the blue. He was not afraid of the rain, though if it meant another week of wet weather such as had already soaked the country, it would also mean much discomfort and inconvenience in the muddy little domain of Penton Hook. But it was not this he was thinking of. His own previous reflections, and the sharp reminder of the past that was in old Crockford's random talk, made a combination not unlike that of the dark clouds and the lurid reflected colors of the sky. Mistake? Yes; no doubt there had been a mistake-many mistakes, one after another, mistakes which the light out of the past, with all its dying gleams, made doubly apparent. His mind was so full of all these thoughts that he arrived at his own gates full of them, without thinking of the passing vision which had stirred up old Crockford, and his own mind too, on hearing of it. But when he pushed open the gate and caught sight of the two bays, pawing and rearing their heads, with champ and stir of all their trappings, as if they disdained the humble door at which they stood, Edward Penton's middle-aged heart gave a sudden jump in his breast. Alicia here! What could such a portent mean?

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CHAPTER VI.

RICH MRS. PENTON AND POOR MRS. PENTON.

MRS. RUSSELL PENTON had not come to the Hook for nothing. It was years since she had visited her cousin's house-partly because of repeated absences-for the family at Penton were fond of escaping from the winter, and generally spent that half of the year on the Riviera—partly from the feeling she had expressed to her husband, which was not a very Christian feeling, of repulsion from her father's heir: and partly, which was perhaps the strongest reason of all, because they were not, as she said, "in our own sphere." How can the wife and many children of a poor man living in a small muddy river-side house be in the sphere of one of the great ladies of the district? Only great qualities on one side or another, great affection or some other powerful inducement, would be enough to span that gulf. And no such link existed between the two houses. But there had come to light between her father and herself in one of those close and long consultations, to which not even her husband was admitted, a plan which required Edward Penton's concurrence, and which, they concluded between them, had better be set before him by Alicia herself. This might have been done by summoning the heir-at-law to Penton. But Russell Penton's veiled remonstrances, his laugh at her inconsistency, his comparison of the importance of the moth-eaten tapestry and poor Mrs. Penton's inability to cut her coat according to her cloth, had not been without effect on his wife's mind. was not incapable of perceiving the point which he made; and though she confessed to nobody, not even to herself, that her visit to Penton Hook had a little remorseful impulse in it, yet this mingled largely with the evident business which might have been managed in another way. Many recollections rose in her mind also as she went along, not exposed even to such interruptions as that of old Crockford, all by herself with her own thoughts, remembering in spite of herself the youthful expeditions in which the Hook was so large a feature, the boating parties that "took the water '' there, the anxious exertions of poor Edward to

make his forlorn little mansion bright. Poor Edward! She remembered so clearly his eager looks, his desire to please, the anxious devices with which he sought to gratify her tastes, to show how his own followed them. She had not seen much of his older aspect, and had no distinct image in her mind to correct that of the eager young man reading her face to see if she approved or disapproved, and having no higher standard by which to shape his own opinions. She saw him in that aspect: and she saw him as by a lightning flash of terrible recollection, which was half imagination, as he had appeared to her by the side of her last brother's grave, the chief mourner and the chief gainer, concealing a new-born sense of his own importance under the conventional guise of woe. Alicia was half conscious that she did poor Edward wrong. He was not the sort of man to exult in his own advantage as purchased by such a terrible family tragedy. But even now, when the passion of grief and loss was over, she could not surmount the bitter suggestion, the knowledge that he had certainly gained by what was ruin to her father's house. When she drove past the old stone-breaker on the road without taking any notice of him, without even remarking his presence, this had been the recollection with which her soul was filled. But her heart melted as the carriage swept along by all the well-remembered corners, and a vision of the happy youthful party of old, the sound of the boats at the little landing, the eager delight of the young master of the place, seemed to come back to her ears and eyes.

But Penton Hook did not look much like a boating party to-day. The water was very near the level of the too green grass, the empty damp flower-beds, the paths that gleamed with wet. A certain air of deprecating helplessness standing feebly against that surrounding power was in everything about. Alicia, as she was now, the active-minded manager of much property, full of energy and resources, one of those who, like the centurion, have but to say, "Come, and he cometh; do this, and he doeth it," cast her eyes, awakened out of all dreams, upon the sweep of river and the little bit of weeping soil which seemed to lie in its grasp appealing for mercy to the clouds and the skies. The sight gave new life to all her scornful comments upon the incompetency of those who, knowing what they had, could not take the dignified position of making

it do, but sunk into failure and helpless defeat. She planned rapidly in a moment what she would do, were it but to keep the enemy at bay. Were it hers she would scarcely have waited for the dawn of the morning, she would have sent in her workmen, prepared her plans, learned the best way to deal with it, long ago. She would have made herself the mistress, not the slave, of the surrounding stream. In whatever way, at whatever cost, she would have freed herself, she would have overcome these blind influences of nature. It was with a little scorn, feeling that she could have done this, feeling that she would like to do it, that it would be a pleasure to fight and overcome that silent, senseless force, that Mrs. Russell Penton, rich Mrs. Penton, swept in through the weeping gardens of the Hook, and with all the commotion of a startling arrival, her bays prancing, her wheels cutting the gravel,

drew up before the open door.

The door was always open, whether the day was warm or cold, with an aspect not of hospitality and liberal invitation, but rather of disorder and a squalid freedom from rule. The hall was paved with vulgar tiles which showed the traces of wet feet, and Mrs. Russell Penton sunk down all at once from her indignant half-satisfied conviction that it was a sign of the incompetency of poor Edward in his present surroundings that he had never attempted to do anything to mend matters when brought thus face to face with poverty. The traces of the wet feet appalled her. This was just such an evidence of an incompetent household and careless mistress as fitted in to her theory; but it was terrible to her unaccustomed senses, to which a perfection of nicety and propriety was indispensable, and any branch of absolute cleanness and purity unknown. The maid, who hurried frightened, yet delighted, to the door, did not,however, carry out the first impression made. She was so neat in her black gown and white apron that the visitor was nonplused as by an evident contradiction. "Can you tell me if Mr. Penton is at home?" she asked, leaning out of the carriage and putting aside the footman with a momentary feeling that this, perhaps, might be one of poor Edward's daughters acting as house maid. "No, my lady; but missis is in," said the handmaid with a courtesy which she had learned at school. Martha did not know who the visitor was, but felt that in all circumstances to call a visitor who came in such a fine carriage my lady could not be

wrong.

Missis is in!" Rich Mrs. Penton felt a momentary thrill. It was as if she had been hearing herself spoken of in unimaginable circumstances. She paused a little with a sense of unwillingness to go further. She had met on various occasions the insignificant pretty young woman who was poor Edward's wife. She had made an effort to be kind to her when they were first married, when the poor Pentons were still more or less in one's own sphere. But there had been nothing to interest her, nothing to make up for the trouble of maintaining so uncomfortable a relationship, and since that period she had not taken any notice of her cousin's wife, a woman always immured in nursing cares, having babes or nourishing them, or deep in some one of those semi-animal (as she said) offices which disgust a fastidious woman, who in her own person has nothing of the kind to do. A woman without children becomes often very fastidious on this point. Perhaps the disgust may be partly born of envy, but at all events it exists and is strong. Mrs. Penton hesitated as to whether she would turn back and not go in at all, or whether she would wait at the door till Edward came in, or ask to be shown into his particular sitting-room to wait for him: but that, she reflected, would be a visible slight to Edward's wife. The unexpressed unformulated dread of what Russell might say restrained her here. He would not criticise, but he would laugh, which was much worse. He would perhaps give vent to a certain small whistle which she knew very well, when she acknowledged that she had been to Penton Hook without seeing the mistress of the house. She did not at all confess to herself that she was a coward, but as a matter of fact rich Mrs. Penton was more afraid of that whistle than poor Mrs. Penton was of anything, except scarlatina. Alicia hesitated; she sat still in her carriage for the space of a minute, while simple Martha gazed as if she had been a queen, and admired the deep fur on the lady's velvet mantle, and the bonnet which had come from Paris. Then Mrs. Penton made up her mind. "Perhaps your mistress will see me," she said; "I should like to wait till Mr. Penton comes in."

"Oh, yes, my lady," Martha said. Though she had been carefully instructed how to answer visitors, she felt

instinctively that this visitor could not be asked her name as if she was an ordinary lady making a call. She then opened the drawing-room very wide and said, "Please,

ma'am!" then stopped and let the great lady go in.

Mrs. Penton, poor Mrs. Penton was sitting by the fire on a low chair. There was not light enough to work by, and yet there was too much light to ask for the lamp. It was a welcome moment of rest from all the labors that were her heritage. She liked it perhaps all the better that her husband and the older ones, who would talk or make demands upon her to be talked to, were out and she was quite free. To be alone now and then for a moment is sweet to a hardworked woman who never is alone. Indeed, she was not alone now. Two of the little ones were on the rug by her feet. But they made no demands upon their mother, they played with each other, keeping up a babble of little voices. within reach of her hand to be patted on the head, within reach of her dress to cling to, should a wild beast suddenly appear or an ogre or a naughty giant. Thus, though they said nothing to each other, they were a mutual comfort and support, the mother to the children and the children to the mother. And if we could unveil the subtle chain of thinking from about that tired and silent woman's heart, the reader would wonder to see the lovely things that were there. But she was scarcely aware that she was thinking, and what she thought was not half definite enough to be put into words. A world of gentle musings, one linked into another, none of them separable from the rest, was about her in the firelight, in the darkness, the quiet and not ungrateful fatigue. She was not thinking at all she would have said. It was as though something revolved silently before her, gleaming out here and there a recollection or realization. The warmth, the dimness, the quiet, lulled her in the midst of all her cares. She had thought of Osy till her head ached. How this dreadful misfortune could be averted; how he could be kept on at Marlborough; until, in the impossibility of finding any expedient, and the weariness of all things, her active thoughts had dropped. They dropped as her hands dropped, as she gave up working, and for that moment of stillness drew her chair to the fire. There was nothing delightful to dwell upon in all that was around and about her. But God, whom in her voiceless way she trusted deeply, delivered the tired mother

from her cares for the moment, and fed her with angels' food as she sat without anything to say for herself, content by the fire.

It was a moment before she realized what had happened when the door opened and the visitor swept in. She was not clever or ready, and her first consciousness that some one had come in was confused, so that she did not know how to meet the emergency. She rose up hastily, all her sweet thoughts dispersing; and the children, who saw a shadowy tall figure and did not know what it was, shuffled to her side and laid hold of her dress with a horrible conviction that the ogre who eats children on toast had come at last. Rich Mrs. Penton sweeping in had command of the scene better than poor Mrs. Penton had who was its principal figure. She saw the startled movement, the slim figure rising up from before the fire, in nervous uncertainty what to say or do, and the sudden retreat of the little ones from their place in the foreground, lighted by the warm glow of the fire, to the shelter of their mother's dress. The whole group had a timid, alarmed look which half piqued and half pleased Alicia. She rather liked the sensation of her own imposing appearance which struck awe, and yet was annoyed that any one should be afraid of her. She had no doubt what to do; she went forward into the region of the firelight and held out a hand. don't remember me," she said, "or perhaps it is only that you don't see me. I am Alicia Penton. May I sit down here a little till my cousin comes in?"

"Mrs. Russell Penton! oh, sit down, please. Will you take this chair, or will you come nearer the fire? I am ashamed to have been so stupid, but I have not many visitors, and I never thought—will you take this chair, please?" 'You never thought that I should be one? Oh, don't

"You never thought that I should be one? Oh, don't think I blame you for saying so. It is my fault; I have often felt it. I hope you will let by-gones be by-gones now,

and look upon me as a friend."

"Horry," said Mrs. Penton, "run and tell Martha to bring the lamp." She did not make any direct reply to her visitor's overture. "I am fond of sitting in the firelight," she said. "A little moment when there is nothing to do, when all is so quiet, is pleasant. But it is awkward when any one comes in, for we can not see each other. I

hope Sir Walter is quite well," she added, after a mo-

mentary pause. w . Home one yews base son bluoo ode rotte!

It was in the rich Mrs. Penton's heart to cry out, "Don't ask me about Sir Walter; you don't hope he is well; you wish he was dead, I know you must, you must!" These words rushed to her lips but she did not say them. There was in this mild interior no justification for such a speech. The absence of light threw a veil upon all the imperfections of the place, and there was something in the gentle indifference of the mistress of the house, the absence of all feeling in respect to her visitor except a startled civility, which somehow humbled and silenced the proud woman. She had been, in spite of herself, excited about this meeting. She had come in with her heart beating, making overtures, which she never would have made to a stranger. She did not know what she expected; either to be received with warm and astonished gratitude, or to be held at arm'slength in offense. But this mild woman in the soft confusion of the firelit gloom did neither—had not evidently been thinking of her at all—had no feeling about her one way or another. Mrs. Russell Penton felt like one who had fallen from a height. She blushed unseen with a hot sensation of shame. To feel herself of so much less consequence than she expected, was extraordinary to her, a sensation such as she had rarely felt before. She felt even that the pause she made before replying, which she herself felt so much, and during which so many things went through her head, was lost upon the other, who was preoccupied about the lamp, and anxious lest it should smell, and concerned with a hundred other things.

"My father is quite well," said Alicia, with a little emphasis; "I never saw him in better health. It is not thought necessary for him, he is so well, to go abroad this

year.'

The maid was at the door with the lamp, and there came in with her, exactly as Mrs. Penton feared, an odor of paraffin, that all-pervading unescapable odor which is now so familiar everywhere. She scarcely caught what her visitor said, so much more anxious was she about this. And in her mind there arose the anxious question, what to do? Was it better to say nothing about the smell, and hope that perhaps it might not be remarked? or confess the matter and make a commotion, calling Mrs. Penton's

attention to it by sending it away? Even if she did the latter she could not send away the smell, which, alas! was here, anyhow, and would keep possession. She resolved desperately, therefore, to take no notice, to hope, perhaps, that it might not be remarked. This presumption, though poor Mrs. Penton was so far from suspecting it, completed the discomfiture of the great lady who had made sure that her visit would be a great event.

"I am very glad," said the mistress of the house at last, vaguely; "Edward has gone out for a walk, he will be in directly, and I am sure it will give him great pleasure to see you. The girls are out, too; there is not very much for them in the way of amusement at this time of the year."

And then there was a pause, for neither of the ladies knew what to say. Mrs. Russell Penton examined her hostess closely by the light of the malodorous lamp. It was kinder to the poor lady than daylight would have been, and to the poor room, which, with the flickering firelight rising and falling, and the shade over the lamp, which left the walls and the furniture in a flattering obscurity, showed none of their imperfections to the stranger's eyes. And all that was apparent in Mrs. Penton was that her gown, which was of no particular color, but dark and not badly cut, hung about her slim figure with a certain grace, and that the curling twist of her hair, done up in that soft large knot on the back of her head, suited her much better than a more elaborate coiffure would have done. Rich Mrs. Penton looked closely at her poor relation, but her scrutiny was not returned. The thing that had now sprung into prominence in the mind of the mistress of the house was whether Martha would bring tea in nicely, and whether the cake would be found which was kept for such great occasions, without an appeal to herself for the keys. She was careful and burdened about many things; but in the very excess of her anxieties was delivered from more serious alarms. It did not occur to her to trouble herself with the questions which the children had asked each other so anxiously, which Mr. Penton was inquiring of himself with a beating heart, "What could have brought Alicia Penton here?? which there arose the anxious question, whiseand Was it better to say nothing about the smell, and

hope that perhaps it might not be remarked; or confess

THE CAME STORY AND HELD HERED WINDOWS POWER TO

CHAPTER VII.

THE YOUNG AND THE OLD.

THERE was, however, no lack of excitement when the rest of the family came in. The girls dazzled with the quick transition from the darkness outside to the light within, their eyes shining, their lips apart with breathless curiosity and excitement, and a thrill of interest which might have satisfied the requirements of any visitor; and after a little interval their father, pale, and somewhat breathless, too, whose expectation was not of anything agreeable, but rather of some new misfortune, of which perhaps his cousin had come to tell him. Edward Penton did not pause to think that it was very unlikely that Alicia would thus break in upon his retirement in order to tell him of some misfortune. The feeling was instinctive in his mind, because of long acquaintance with defeat and failure, that every new thing must mean further trouble. He was always ready to encounter that in his depressed way. He came into the atmosphere which was tinged with the smell of paraffin, the discomfort of which was habitual to him, added to the undercurrent of irritation in his mind, and with the feeling that there was already a crowd of people in the room, where probably no one was necessary but himself. Alicia Penton had long, long ceased to be an object of special interest to him; nobody now was of particular interest to Mr. Penton in that or any sentimental way. The people who were about him now either belonged to him, in which case they gave him a great deal of altogether inevitable trouble; or else they did not belong to him, and were probably more or less antagonistic-wanting things from him, entertainment, hospitality, subscriptions, something or other which he did not wish to give. Such were the two classes into which the human race was divided; but if there was a debatable ground between the two, a scrap of soil upon which a human foot could be planted, Sir Walter and his daughter were its possible inhabitants. They belonged to him, too-in a way; they were antagonistic, too—in a way. Both the other halves of the world were more or less united in them.

He came forward into the light, which, however, revealed his knickerbockers and muddy boots more distinctly than his face. "It is a long time," he said, "since we have met."

"Yes, Edward, it is a long time: I have been saying so to your wife. The girls have grown up since I saw them last; they were little girls then, and now they are -grown up 12 w belonde sing off an omes dimes

When emotion reaches a high strain and becomes impassioned the power of expression is increased, and eloquence comes: but on the lower levels of feeling, suppressed excitement and commotion of mind often find utterance in the merest commonplace.

"Yes, they are grown up—the boy, too," said Mr. Pen-

ton, under the same spell.

She cast a glance upward to where, beyond the lamp, on his mother's side of the table, Wat appeared, a lengthy shadow, perhaps the most uncongenial of all. She made a slight forward inclination of her head in recognition of his presence, but no more. The girls she had shown a certain pleasure in. They stood together, with that pretty look of being but one which a pair of sisters often have, so brightly curious and excited, scanning her with such eager eyes that it would have been difficult not to respond to their frank interest. But Mrs. Penton could not tolerate Wat; his very presence was an offense to her, and the instinctive way in which he went over to his mother's side, and stood there in the gloom looking at the visitor over the shade of the lamp. She would have none of him, but she turned with relief to the girls.

"I am ashamed to ask the question," she said, "but which of you is my godchild? You seem about the same

age." at som biblisent usle to gettinget telegrivers var

It was a vexation that it should be the other one—the one who was like her mother, not the impetuous darker girl whose eyes devoured the great lady who was her cousin -who replied, "It is I who am Ally. There is only a year between us. We are more together than any of the

"Ally!" said Mrs. Russell Penton, with a little scorn. "And what is your name?"

"I am Anne."

[&]quot;She should be Anna," said her mother, "which is far

prettier; but she likes what is shortest best. There are so many of them. None of them have their full names. Some families make a great stand on that—to give every one their full name."

"It is a matter of taste," said the visitor, coldly.

She was doubly, but most unreasonably, annoyed after her first moment of interest to find that it was the wrong sister who was her godchild, and that even she did not bear the name that had been given her. It seemed a want of respect, not only to herself, but to the family, in which there had been Alicias for countless years.

"I hope my uncle is well?" said Mr. Penton, after another embarrassed pause. Sir Walter was not his uncle, but it was a relic of the old days, when he was a child of the house, that the younger cousin was permitted to call the elder so. "I heard you were not going away this year."

"No; the doctors think he may stay at home, as there is every prospect of a mild winter. Of course, if it became suddenly severe we could take him away at a moment's notice."

"Of course," Edward Penton said. However severe the weather might become neither he nor his could be taken away at a moment's notice. He could not help feeling conscious of the difference, but with a faint smile breaking upon his depression. Alicia did not mean it, he was sure, but it seemed curious that she should put the contrast so very clearly before him. There was a little whispering going on between the mother and daughters about the tea. Tea was a substantial meal at the Hook, and the little ornamental repast at five o'clock was unusual, and made a little flurry in the household. Mrs. Penton had to give Anne certain instructions about a little thin bread-andbutter and the cake. She thought that Edward, who was keeping up the conversation, screened off these whisperings from his cousin's notice; but as a matter of fact Alicia was keenly alive to all that was taking place, and felt a sharper interest in the anxiety about Martha's appearance than in anything Edward was saying. "You still keep the villa at Cannes?" he went on a seed the tree bas arrege a lemant

"Yes; up to this time it has been a necessity for my

father; but I have not seen him so well for years."

"I am very glad to hear it," Mr. Penton said, with a little emphasis. He had to stand aside as he spoke, for

Martha arrived, rather embarrassed, with her tray, for which there was no habitual place; and the girls had to clear the books and ornaments off a little table while she waited. He was used to these domestic embarrassments, and it must be said for him that he did the best he could to screen them even at the sacrifice of himself. He drew a chair near to his cousin and sat down, thus doing what he could to draw her keen attention from these details. "It is long since I have seen Penton," he said. "I hear you have made many improvements. 32 and of vino ton tonger

"Nothing that you would remark—only additions to the comfort of the house. It used to be rather cold, you will other embarrassed panse. Sir Walter was not redmemer.

"I don't think I knew what cold was in those old days," he said, with a slight involuntary shiver, for the door had just opened once more to admit the cake, and a draught

came in from the always open hall, it wood on

We have had it now warmed throughout," said Mrs. Russell Penton, with a slight momentary smile; "and we are thinking of fitting it up with the electric light. My husband has a turn for playing with science. It is a great deal of trouble at first, but very little afterward, I believe; and very convenient, without any of the drawbacks of lamps or gas. There a distributed some restriction of the audioance

She could not but turn her head as she spoke to the large crystal lamp upon the table, which filled the room with something more than light. The tea had been arranged by this time, and poor Mrs. Penton had begun to pour it out, but not yet was her mind disengaged from the many anxieties involved-for the tea was poor. She shook her head and made a little silent appeal to the girls as she poured out the first almost colorless cup. And then there was a jug of milk, but no cream. This necessitated another whispering, and the swift dispatch of Ally to fetch what was wanted. Mrs. Russell Penton looked on at all this, and took in every detail as if it had been a little scene of a comedy enacted for her amusement; but there was in the amusement an acrid touch. The smile was sharp, like Ithuriel's spear, and cut all those innocent little cobwebs away. I when a med and it emit and of on

"I have no doubt you will make it very complete," Edward Penton said, with a sigh. There was an assumed proprietorship about all she said, which was like cutting him off from the succession, that only possibility which lay in his future. And yet they could not cut him off, he said, to himself.

"Is this tea for me? How very kind! but I never take it at this hour," said Alicia, putting up her gloved hand with a little gesture of refusal. It smote, if not her heart, yet her conscience, a little to see the look that passed between the mother and the girls. Had Russell seen that scene he would assuredly have retired into a corner, and relieved himself with a whistle, before asking for a cup and eating half the cake, which was what he would have done regardless of consequences. Rendered compunctious by this thought, Alicia added, hastily, "You must bring the girls up to see the house; they ought to know it; and I hope I may see more of them in the time to come."

"Their mother, I have no doubt, will be pleased," said

Edward Penton, vaguely. The solution of a vig Him to told

. "Indeed, you must not think of me," his wife said; she had not taken offense. It was not in her mild nature to suppose that any one could mean to slight or insult her; but she was a little annoyed by the unnecessary waste of tea. "I am a poor walker, you know, Edward; and always occupied with the children; but I am sure the girls would like it very much. It would be very nice for them to make acquaintance—Wat could walk up with them if you were busy. Especially in the winter," she said, with a little conciliatory smile toward the great lady, "I am al-

ways looking out for a little change for the girls."

She rose, in all the splendor of her velvet and furs, and the whole family rose with her. A thought ran through their minds—a little astonished shock—a question, Was it possible that this was all she had come for? It was a very inadequate conclusion to the excitement and expectation in all their minds. Mrs. Penton alone did not feel this shock. She did not think the result inadequate; a renewal of acquaintance, an invitation to the girls, probably the opening to them of a door into society and the great world. She came forward with what to her was warmth and enthusiasm. "It is very kind of you to have called," she said, "I am truly grateful, for I make few calls myself, and I can't wonder if I fall out of people's recollection. It is a great thing for a woman like you to come out of your way

to be kind to Edward's little girls. I am very grateful to you, and I will never forget it.' Poor Mrs. Penton gave her rich namesake a warm pressure of the hand, looking at her with her mild, large-lidded gray eyes, lit up by a smile which transformed her face. Not a shadow of doubt, not the faintest cloud of consciousness that Alicia's motive had been less than angelic, was in her look or in her thoughts.

Rich Mrs. Penton faltered and shrunk before this look of gratitude. She knew that, far from deserving it, there had been nothing but contempt in her thoughts toward this simple woman who had been to her like a bit of a comedy. She withdrew her hand as quickly as possible from that

grateful clasp.

"You give me credit—that I don't deserve," she said.
"I—I came to speak to my cousin on business. It was really a—I won't call it a selfish motive, that brought me.

But it will give me real pleasure to see the girls."

To divine the hidden meaning of this little speech, which was entirely apologetic, occupied the attention of the anxious family suddenly pushed back into eagerness again by the intimation of her real errand. It was not all for nothing, then! It was not a mere call of civility! Mr. Penton, who had felt something like relief when she rose, consoled by the thought that there could not at least be any new misfortune to intimate to him, fell again into that state of melancholy anticipation from which he had been roused, while the young ones bounded upward to the height of expectation. Something was coming—something new! It did not much matter to them what it was. They looked on with great excitement while their father conducted his cousin across the hall to his book-room, as it was called. They were not given to fine names at Penton Hook. It had been called the library in former days. But it was a little out at elbows, like the rest of the house—the damp had affected the bindings, the gilding was tarnished, the russia leather dropping to pieces, a smell of mustiness and decay, much contended against, yet indestructible, was in the place. And it was no longer the library, but only the bookroom. The door of the drawing-room being left open, the family watched with interest indescribable the two figures crossing the hall. Mrs. Russell Penton, though she had not been there for so many years, knew her way, which particular interested the girls greatly, and opened a new

vista to them, into the past. Mrs. Penton, for her part, knew well enough all about Alicia, but she was not jealous. She shivered slightly as she saw the great lady's skirt sweep It was me hade haste, Anne on make haste, illad edt

"Oh, Anne," she whispered, "tell Martha to bring a cloth and wipe it. A velvet dress! You children, with your wet feet, you are enough to break any one's heart. What are the mats put there for, I should like to know?"

"Oh, what do you think of her, mother? Did you like her? Don't you think she meant to be kind? Do you

think we must go? " ed ed tol vieles betogne made

"Certainly you must go," said Mrs. Penton. "What do I think of her? This is not the first time I have seen Alicia Penton, that you should ask me such a question. Yes, yes, you must go. You ought to know that house better than any house in the country, and it is only right that you should first go into society there."

"Do you think Cousin Alicia will ask us to parties? Do you think she really meant-really, without thinking of

anything else—to be kind to Ally and me?"

"Anne, I am sorry that you should take such notions." What object could she have but kindness," said Mrs. Penton, with mild conviction, "for coming here? It is all very well to talk of business with your father. Yes, no doubt she has business with your father, or she would not have said so; but I am very sure she must have suffered from the estrangement. I always thought she must suffer. Men do not think of these things, but women do. I feel sure that she has talked her father over at last, and that we are all to be friends again. Sir Walter is an old man; he must want to make up differences. What a dreadful thing it would be to die without making it up!"

"Was there any real quarrel?" said Wat, coming forward with his hands in his pockets. "She may be kind enough, mother, that fine lady of yours, but she does not like me."

"How can she know whether she likes you or not? She

doesn't know you, Wat." Wat.

"She hates me, all the same. I have never done anything to her that I know of. I suppose I did wrong to be born." awo and of bernier conent his vicenia ent of crieft

"If it were not you it would be some one else," said Mrs. Penton; "but, children! oh, don't talk in this hard way. Think how her brothers died, and that she has no children. And the house she loves to go away from her, and nothing to be hers! I do not think I could bear it if it was me. Make haste, Anne, oh, make haste, and get Martha to wipe up the hall. And, Horry, you may as well have the thin bread and butter. If I had only known that

Mrs. Russell Penton never took tea-'?' nov door down mov

About this failure Mrs. Penton was really concerned; it was not only a waste of the tea and of that nice bread and butter (which Horry enjoyed exceedingly), but it was a sort of a sham, enacted solely for the benefit of the visitor, which was objectionable in other points of view besides that of extravagance. It gave her a sense of humiliation as if she had been masquerading in order to deceive a stranger who was too quick of wit to be deceived. But Mrs. Penton neither judged her namesake, nor was suspicious of her, nor was she even very curious as the children were, as to the subject of the interview which was going on in the book-room. She feared nothing from it, nor did she expect anything. She was not ready to imagine that anything could happen. Sir Walter might die, of course, and that would make a change; but she had Mrs. Russell Penton's word for it that Sir Walter was better than usual: and in the depth of her experience of that routine of common life which kept on getting a little worse, but had never been broken by any surprising incidents, she had little faith in things happening. She felt even that she would not be surprised for her part if Sir Walter should never die. He was eighty-five, and he might live to be a hundred. Though they had not met for years she saw nothing extraordinary in the fact that Alicia Penton had come to talk over some business matters with her cousin. It was partly indolence of mind and partly because she had so much that was real to occupy her that she had no time for imaginary cases. And so while the girls hung about the doors in excitement unable to settle to anything, curious to see their great relation pass out again, and to watch her getting into her carriage, and pick up any information that might be attainable about the object of her mission, Mrs. Penton with a word of rebuke to their curiosity, took Horry upstairs to the nursery and thence retired to her own room to make her modest little toilet for the evening. There was no dinner to dress for, but the mother of the household

thought it was a good thing as a rule and example that she should put on a different gown for tea.

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THE PROPOSAL.

ALICIA was a little subdued when she found herself in the old library, the room she had known so well in other circumstances. The air of decay, the unused books which she had borrowed and read and talked over, Edward being a little more disposed that way than her brothers, and ready to give her advice about her reading, and receive with reverence her comments which the others took no interest in, impressed her in spite of herself. Her eyes turned to the corner in which there had been a collection of the poets more accessible and readable than any that existed at Penton, where the books were all of a ponderous kind. They were still there, the same little volumes, which it had been so easy to carry about, which had been brought from the Hook in Edward's pocket, which she had taken with her in the boat and read in the shady corners under the trees among the water-lilies. She could see they were still there, the binding a little tarnished, the line broken, as if several volumes were lost or absent. Who read them now? She gave but one glance and saw everything, then turned her back upon that corner. There was a table in the window which had not been there formerly, a table covered with books and papers such as she was sure Edward Penton did not amuse himself with. It would be the boy whose name had not been mentioned, whom she had taken no notice of, yet of whom, with a jealous, angry consciousness, she had felt the presence through all.

"You have made few changes," she said, involuntarily, as she turned the chair he had placed for her half round, so as not to see the shelf with its range of little volumes. The book-room was perhaps the most comfortable in the house, but for that faint mustiness. The walls were well lined with books. It had been a good collection twenty years ago, and though there had been few additions made, it was still a good collection, and the fading of the gilding and a little raggedness of binding here and there did not injure the appearance of the well-covered walls. Mr. Penton

lighted the two candles on the writing-table, which seemed to add two little inquisitive eldritch spectators, blinking their little flames at the human actors in this drama, and

watching all they did and said.

"No, there are no changes to speak of; I have had other things to think of than making changes," he said, with a little abruptness, perhaps thinking that she was making a contrast between the unalterable circumstances of his poverty and all that had been done in the great house. But she had no such meaning, nor did she understand the tone of almost reproach in which he spoke. The beworded had

"You must have had a great deal to do, with your family; but there are cares which many people count as happiness, in soot eredte ent foldw stuemmes ved emerseen iti

"I am making no complaint," he said.

And then there was a pause. There had been struck a wrong note which rang jarring into the air, and made it more difficult to begin again.

"You must have been surprised," she said, "to find me

here to-day. We need had dold to look

"I don't know that I was surprised; perhaps it was more surprising, if I may speak my mind, Alicia, that so long a time has passed without seeing you here. I never

harmed you, that I know."

"No," she said, "you never harmed us; it has been a miserable mistake altogether. For years past I have felt it to be so; but we are the slaves of our own mistakes. I never seemed to have the courage to take the first step to make it right."

She had neither meant to say this, nor in cold blood would she have allowed it to be true; but she was carried away by the subtle influence of the familiar place, by the sight of the books she used to borrow, and many an inde-

finable recollection and influence besides.

He gave a little short laugh. "That is the second time to-night," he said, "that I have heard the same thing said." If she had but known who the other was who had said it, the old man breaking stones, who had been so glad of his twopence! Mr. Penton could not restrain the brief comment of that laugh.

"It does not matter who says it," said Alicia, "it is true. A thing is done in passion, in misery: and then it is hard to descend from our pride, or to acknowledge ourselves wrong. And you will think, perhaps," she added, quickly, with rising color, "that it is a selfish motive that brings me here to-day?"

Edward Penton shook his head. "A selfish motive would mean that I could be of use to you; and I don't

think that is very probable," he said. I would were the

Mrs. Russell Penton colored still more. "Edward," she said, faltering a little, "it is curious, when there is an object on which one has set one's heart, how one is led on to do things that only in the doing appear in their true colors. I have let you think I came to renew old friend-ship—to see your children, your girls." She grew more and more agitated as she went on, and there came out in her a hundred tones and looks of the old Alicia, who had seemed to him to have no connection with this mature dignified self-important woman—looks and tones which moved him as the old books in the corner, and all the associations of the place, had moved her.

"It does not matter why you have come; I am glad you have come, anyhow; and if I can do anything—" he made a pause, and laughed again, this time at himself. "It doesn't seem very likely, looking at you and at me; but you know I was always your faithful servant," he said.

"There is only one thing I have to say for myself, Ed-ward—I would not allow the proposal to be made to you by

any one but me." were part of were out to bus blo er

"What is it?" he asked. There was a proposal then, and it was something to benefit her! Edward Penton's bosom swelled with perhaps the first pleasurable sense of his own position which he had felt for years. Penton had always been an excitement to him, but there had been little pleasure in it. For a moment, however, now, he felt himself the old, the young Edward Penton, who had been the faithful servant of Alicia. He could not imagine anything which he could have it in his power to do for her, but still less could he imagine anything which he would refuse.

She went on with a hesitation which was very far from being natural to her. "You know," she said, "that when my father dies, which is an event that can not be far distant, I shall have to give up—the only home I have ever

known."

His attention was fully aroused now. He looked at her across the gleam of the inquisitive candles, with a startled

look. Was she going to ask him to give up his inheritance?

He was too much surprised to speak.

"You will think this an extraordinary beginning; but it is true. I have never lived anywhere else. My marriage, you know, fortunately, has made no difference. Of course I am my father's heir in everything but what is entailed. It has occurred to us—we have thought that perhaps—"

"What have you thought, Alicia?" he cried, with a sudden, sharp remonstrance in his tone; "that I was just, as in former times, ready for anything that you- What have you thought?-that I was in the same position as of old—that there was no one to consult, no one to consider—

except my devotion to you?" You mistake me altogether," she cried. "Your devotion to me-which no doubt is ended long ago-was never taken into consideration at all. We thought of an entirely different motive when we talked it over, my father and I. You will remember that I am only asking a question, Edward. I wanted to ask only if a proposal might be made to you, that was all." And what was the motive which you supposed likely to

move me?" he said. The grideof visual year

He had risen up from his seat, and came and stood by the mantel-piece, leaning on it, and looking down upon her. There was a great commotion in his mind—a commotion of the old and of the new. He had grown soft and tender a few minutes before, feeling himself ready to do anything for her which a lady could ask of a man. But now, when it appeared to him that she had gone far beyond that sphere, and was about to ask from him the sacrifice of everything-his property, his inheritance, the fortune of his children—a sudden hot fountain of indignation seemed to have risen within the man. He felt as the knight did in the poem when his lady lightly threw her glove among the lions—an impulse to give her what she asked, to fling it in her face, doing her behest in contempt of the unwomanly impulse which had tempted her to strain her power so far. This was how he felt. No reasonable sentiment of selfdefense, but a burning temptation to take his heirship, his hopes, all that made the future tolerable, and fling them with an insult in her face.

"Edward," she said, "I came to you in confidence that you would hear me—that you would let me speak plainly without offense; I mean none," she said, with agitation. "But we have both come to a reasonable age, and surely we may talk to each other without wounding each other—about circumstances which everybody can see."

"Speak freely, Alicia. I only want to know what you wish, and what there is in me to justify the proposal, what-

ever it may be, that you have come to make."

"I have begun wrong," she said, with a gesture of disappointment. "It is difficult to find the right words. Will you be angry if I say it is no secret that you—that we—for Heaven's sake don't think I mean to hurt you—plainly, that I, with all my father can leave, will be in a better position for keeping up Penton than you who are the heir-at-law."

He stood for some time with his arm on the mantel-piece making no answer, looking down at the faint redness of a fire which had almost burned out.

"So that's all," he said at last, with the tremulous note of a sudden laugh; and drawing a chair close up to it, began to gather together the scraps of half-consumed wood into a blaze. All that he produced was a very feeble momentary glimmer, which leaped up and then died out. He threw down the poker with another short laugh. "Significant," he said, "symbolical! so that is all, Alicia? You are sure you want no more?"

"You have not heard me out; you don't understand. Edward, I know the first effect must be painful, but every word you will listen to will lessen that impression. I am,

if you will remember, a little older than you are."

"We were born, I think, in the same year."

"That makes a woman much older. I told you so when it meant more. And I am a woman, more feeble of constitution than you are—not likely to live so long."

"On the contrary, if you will allow me to interrupt you; women, I believe, as a rule, are longer-lived than men."

She drew back with a pained and irritated look. "You

make me feel like a lawyer supporting a weak case. It was not in this way that I wanted to talk it over with you, Edward."

"To talk over the sacrifice of everything I have ever looked to—my birthright, and the prospects of my children. This is rather a large affair to be talked over be-

tween you and me after five-o'clock tea, Alicia, over a

dying fire."

"Then," she said, "it would have been better I had not meddled at all, as my father always said. He thought it should have been made a business proposal only, through a solicitor. But I—I, like a foolish woman—remembering that we had once been dear friends, and feeling that I had been guilty of neglect, and perhaps unkindness—I would not have anything said till I had come myself, till I had made my little overture of reconciliation, till I—"

"If there is to be frankness on one side there should be frankness on both. Till you had put forth the old influence, which once would have made me do anything—give

up anything-to please you."

"You said," she cried, provoked and humiliated, "not five minutes since, though I did not wish it—never thought

of it—that you were my faithful servant still!"

"Yes," he said; "and do you know what I should like to do now? You have come to ask me for my inheritance as you might ask for a flower out of my garden—if there were any! I should like to fling you your Penton into your apron—into your face—and see you carry it off, and point at you, like—you were always fond of poetry, and you will remember—the fellow that jumped among the lions for a glove—only a glove: only his life, don't you know!"

It was not often that Edward Penton gave way to passion, and it was brutal, this that he said: but for the mo-

ment he had lost all control of himself.

She rose up hurriedly from her chair. "That was no true man!" she cried. "Supposing that the woman was a fool too, she used him only according to his folly to show how false he was." She paused again, breathless, her heart beating with excitement and indignation. "I am not asking you for your inheritance: I came to ask you—whether an arrangement might be proposed to you which should be for your advantage as well as mine. Let us speak frankly, as you say. I am not a girl, to be driven away by an insult, which comes badly—oh, very badly!—from you, Edward. If I have wounded you, you have stung me, bitterly; so let us be quits." She looked at him with a smile of pain. "You have hit hardest, after all; you ought to be pleased with that!"

"I beg your pardon, Alicia," he said.

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"Oh, it is not necessary. It was business, and not sen timent, that brought me here. And this is the brutal truth, Edward-like what you have just said to me. You are poor, and I am well off. Penton would be a millstone round your neck; you could not keep it up. Whereas to me it is my home—almost the thing I love best. Will you come to terms with us to set aside the entail and let me have my home? The terms shall be almost what you like. It can be done directly. It will be like realizing a fortune which may not be yours for years. I ask no gift. Do you think I am not as proud as you are? I would not ask you for a flower out of your garden, as you say, much less your property-your inheritance! Ah, your inheritance! which twenty years ago, when we used to be here together, was no more likely to be yours-! If we begin to talk of these things where shall we end, I wonder?" she added, with another pale and angry smile. "You understand now what I mean? And I have nothing more to say."

"Wait a moment," he said; "I am not sure that I do understand you now. It is not what I thought, apparently, and I beg your pardon. I thought it was something that would be between you and me. But if I hear right, it is a business transaction you propose—something to be done for

an equivalent—a bargain—a sale and barter—a—"

"Yes, that is what I mean; perhaps my father was right, and the solicitors were the people to manage it, not

you and me-"

"To manage it—or not to manage it, as may turn out. Yes, I think that would be the better way. These sort of people can say what they like to each other and it never hurts, whereas you and I— Are you really going? I hope you are very well wrapped up, for the night is cold. But for this little squabble, which is a pity, which never ought to have been—'

"I can not think, Edward, that it was my fault."

"They say that ladies always think that," he said with a smile, "otherwise this first visit after—how long is it?—went off fairly well, don't you think? At forty-five, with a wife and children, a man is no longer ready to throw anything away; but otherwise when it comes to business—"

"I was very foolish not to let it be done in the formal way," she said, with an uneasy blush and intolerable sense of the sarcasm in his tone. But she would not allow her-

self to remain under this disadvantage. "Shall I tell my father that you will receive his proposal and give it your

consideration?"

"My consideration? Surely; my best consideration," he replied, with still the same look of sarcastic coolness, "which anything Sir Walter Penton suggests would naturally command from his—successor. I can not use a milder word than that. My position," he added, with gravity, is not one which I sought or had any hand in bringing about: therefore I can have no responsibility for the changes that have happened in the last twenty years."

"It is I who must beg your pardon now. You are quite right, of course, and there was no fault of yours. Goodnight and good-bye. I hope you will at least think of me

charitably if we should not meet again."

"We shall certainly, I hope, meet again," he said, opening the door for her. "The girls will not forget your invitation to them. They have never seen Penton, and they

take an interest, which you will not wonder at-'

"Oh, I don't wonder—at that or anything," she added, in a lower tone; and, as ill-luck would have it, Wat, standing full in the light of the lamp which lighted the hall, tall in his youthful awkwardness, half antagonistic, half anxious to recommend himself, stood straight before her, so that she could not, without rudeness, refuse his attendance to the door where the carriage lamps were shining and the bays pawing impatiently. She gave his father a look of mingled misery and deprecation as she went out of sight. He alone understood why it was she could not bear the sight of his boy. But though her eyes expressed this anguish, her mouth held another meaning. "You will hear from Mr. Rochford in a day or two," she said, as she drove away.

He sent her back a smile of half-sarcastic acquiescence still; but then Edward Penton went back to his library and shut himself in, and disregarded all the appeals that were made to him during the next hour, to come to tea. First the bell: then Ally tapping softly, "Tea is ready." Then Anne's quicker summons, "Mother wants to know if we are to wait for you?" Then the little applicant, whom he was least able to resist, little Mary, drumming very low down upon the lower panels of the door, with a little song of "Fader! fader!" To all this Mr. Penton turned a dull

ear. He had been angry-he had been cut to the quick: that his poverty should be thus thrown back upon himthat he should be expected to make merchandise of his inheritance, to give up for money the house of his fathers, the only fit residence for the head of the family! All this gave a sharp and keen pang, and roused every instinct of pride and self-assertion. But when the thrill of solitude and reason fell on all that band of suddenly unchained demons, and he thought of the privations round him—the shabbiness of the house; the damp; the poor wife, who could not now at all hold up her head among the county people; the girls, who were little nobodies and saw nothing; Wat, whose young life was spoiled: and Osy-Osy! about whom some determination must be come to. To see a way out of all that and not to accept it: for pride's sake to shut up, not only himself, that was a small matter, but the children, to poverty! The fire went out; the inquisitive candles blinked and spied ineffectually, making nothing of the man who sat there wrapped up within himself, his face buried in his hands. He was chilled almost to ice when his wife stole in and drew him away to the fire in the drawing-room, from which the young ones withdrew to make place for him, with looks full of wonder and awe. And then it was, when he had warmed himself and the ice had melted, that he drew the family council together, and laid before them, old and young, the proposal which Alicia Penton had come to make. at it had been one of m

CHAPTER IX.

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FAMILY COUNSELS.

Mr. Penton drew his chair toward the fire, which was not a usual thing for him to do. When he felt chilly he went to the book-room, where in the evening there was always a log burning. In the drawing-room it was the rule that nobody should approach the fire too closely; Mr. Penton said it was not good for the children, it gave them bad habits, and it scorched their cheeks and injured their eyes. The moral of which probably was that, as there were so many of them, they could not all get near it, and therefore all had to hold back.

But this evening everything was out of rule. The little

ones had been sent to bed. The basket of stockings was pushed aside on the table. Mrs. Penton indeed, unable to bear that breach of use and wont, had taken a stocking out of it furtively and pulled it up on her arm. It was a gray stocking, with immense healthy holes the size of half a crown. She could not get at her needle and worsted without disturbing the family parliament, but at least she could measure the holes and decide how best to approach them, and from what side. Walter had placed himself on the other side of the fire, opposite his father, feeling instinctively that his interests must be specially in question; the girls filled up the intervals between their mother and Wat on the one side, their father on the other. The fire had been stirred into a blaze and danced cheerfully upon all the young faces. The lamp with its smell of paraffin was put aside too, as if it were being punished and put in the corner, for which vindicative step, considering how it smelled and smoked, there was good cause.

"You will understand," said Mr. Penton, "that the visit we have just received must have had some special

"I don't see why you should be so sure of that, Edward," said Mrs. Penton, "unless she said something. It might be just civility. Why not?"

"It was not just civility; I knew that from the first."

"My dear, perhaps you know your own family best: but if it had been one of mine I should have thought it quite natural: to see the children, and hear how we are getting on. "

To this Mr. Penton made no reply; the idea of some one coming to see how he and his family were "getting on" did not gratify him as perhaps it ought to have done.

"I think," said Ally, softly, "that Aunt Alicia came out of kindness, papa."

"To herself, I suppose," he said, quickly; then added, "From her point of view it might appear kindness to us too."

There was again a pause, and they all waited with grow-

ing curiosity to know what it was.

Mr. Penton sat in silence, balancing himself in his chair, knitting his brows as he gazed into the fire. Mrs. Penton pulled the stocking further up upon her arm and made a searching study of the holes.

"You all know," he said at length, "that Penton has been a long time in our family, and that I am the heir of entail."

At this Walter moved a little, almost impatiently, in his chair, with a quick start, which he restrained at once, as if he would have interfered. And he did feel disposed to interfere—to say that it was he who was the heir of entail. His father's priority of course was understood, but it seemed hardly worth while to insist upon it. Nevertheless after the first impulse Walter restrained himself.

"I," said his father, rather sharply, with a certain comprehension and resentment of the impulse, of which, however, he was not minded to take any notice, "am the heir of entail. It is tied down upon me, and can't, in

the nature of things, go to any one else."

"Unless the law were to be changed," interrupted Anne,

remembering too well the discussion of the morning.

He waved his hand with an expression of impatience. "We need not take any such hazard into consideration; it is most improbable, and quite out of the question. As things are, I am the heir of entail. That has been, I don't doubt, a thorn in Sir Walter's flesh. He can't alienate an acre, nor, at his time of life, in honor, cut down a tree."

"I have always said it was hard upon him," Mrs. Pen-

ton observed, in an undertone.

They all gave her a look—the look of partisans, to whom any objection is an offense—all except Anne, who kept up

an attitude of impartiality throughout the whole.

"I don't know why he has put off so long if he had the mind to make such an offer. If it had been further off perhaps I might have been more tempted; but as it is—Alicia wants me to join with her father and break the entail."

The female part of the committee did not immediately see the weight of this statement. It took some time to make them understand: but Walter saw it in a moment, and sprung to his feet in quick resentment. "Father, of course you will not listen to it for a moment!" he cried.

"To break the entail?" said the mother; "but I

thought nothing could do that, Edward."

"Except," said Anne, "a change in the law."

"There is no question of any change in the law," said Mr. Penton, angrily. "How should there be a change in the law? None but demagogues or socialists would ever think of it. The law is too strong in England. As for empirics and revolutionaries—" He snapped his fingers with hot contempt. The suggestion made him angry, although he had himself dwelt upon it in the morning. Then he came back to the real matter: "Yes, there is one way in which it can be done; that is what they want me to do. If I joined with Sir Walter in taking certain steps the entail could be broken: and Penton would go to Alicia,

which it appears is his desire."

"Father!" Walter cried. It was such an unspeakable blow to him, striking at the very root of his personal importance, his dreams, his prospects, everything that was his, that the young man was, what did not always happen, the first to seize upon this terrible idea. He could not keep his seat, but stood up tremulous, leaning upon the mantel-piece, looking down with an angry alarm at all their faces, lighted up by the fire. It seemed to Walter that in this slowness to understand there was something of the indifference which those who are not themselves affected so often show in the threatening of a calamity. Their unawakened surprised looks, not grappling with the question, had a half-maddening effect upon him. They did not care! it did not affect them.

"But, Edward, why should you do that—to please Sir Walter—to please—your cousin? Well, I should always like to keep on good terms with my relations, and do what I could for them; but to give up what we have been looking forward to so long—and the only thing we have to look forward to! I am sure," said Mrs. Penton, tears getting into her voice, "I should be the last person to say anything against relations, or make dispeace, but when you think that it is the only provision we have for the children—the only—and when you remember that there's Walter—"She stopped, unable to go on any further, bewildered, not knowing what to think.

"Father does not mean that. It is not that, whatever

it may mean."

"Of course I do not mean that. You take up all sorts of absurd ideas and then you think I have said it. Sir Walter and Alicia are my relations, it is true, but they don't set up a claim on that score, neither am I such a fool. Try and understand me reasonably, Annie. Prop-

erty is different from everything else; you don't give up your rights to please anybody. Here's how it is. When the heir is willing to step in and break the entail, of course he has compensation for it. Sir Walter is a very old man, the property in all human probability will soon be in my hands, therefore my compensation would be at a heavy rate. They are rich enough," said Mr. Penton, in a sort of smile, "they could afford that."

"They would give father the money," said Anne, in a way she had before found effectual in clearing her mother's

ideas; "and he would let them have the land."

"Edward, is that what it means?"

"Yes, strictly speaking: if you put feelings and pride and everything to one side, and the thought of one's family,

and of all we've looked forward to for years.'

"You can't put them to one side," cried young Walter, sharply, in the keen, harsh, staccato tones of bitterness and fear. "You can't! No money would make up for them, nothing could be put in their place. Father, you feel that as well as I?"

"I feel that as well as you! To whom are you speaking? What are you in the matter?—a boy that may never—that might never—whereas I've thought of it all my life; it has been hanging within reach of my hand, so to speak, for years. I've built everything on it. And a bit of a boy asks me if I feel that—like him! Like him! What is he that he should set himself as a model to me?"

"Ch, father!" cried Ally, with her hand upon his arm.

"Of course," said Mrs. Fenton in her quiet voice, quenching this little eddy of passion far more effectually than if she had taken any notice of it, "that makes a great difference. They would give you the money, and you would let them keep the land? There is justice in that, Edward. I do not say it is a thing to be snapped at at once, although we do want the money so much. But still it is quite just, a thing to be calmly considered. I wish you would tell us now exactly what your cousin wants, and what she would give instead of it. It is like selling a property. I am sure I for one should not mind selling this property if we could get a good price for it: and as we have no associations with Penton and have never lived there, nor—"

"Mother!" Could the old house have been moved by hot human breath as by a wind of indignation, it would

have shook from parapet to basement: but Mrs. Penton on her deep foundation of sense and reason was not shaken at

all. She took no notice of the outcry.

"No, we can have no associations with it," she said, calmly. "I have dined there three or four times in my life, and the children have never been there at all. It would not matter much to us if it were to be swallowed up in an earthquake, so long as its value remained."

The girls did not take their mother's prosaic view. Each on her side, they consoled and smoothed down the gentlemen—the young heir, hot with the destruction of hopes that were entirely visionary, that had never had any reality in them—and the immediate heir, to whom this one thing was the sole touch of romance or of expectation in life.

"Tell us about it, father," and "Oh, Wat, be quiet;

nothing's done yet!' was what they said.

"Your mother takes it all very easy. She was not born a Penton," said the father. "Yes, I'll tell you about it, though she's settled it already without any trouble, you see. It is not so simple to me. Women can be more brutal than any one when they take it in that way. Alicia was disposed to see it in the same light. She said she had been born there, and never had lived anywhere else, so that her feeling to it must be quite different from mine. Different from mine! to whom it has been an enchantment all my life."

"What your cousin said was quite natural, Edward. I

should have said the same thing myself."

"You have just done so, my dear," he said, with a sarcasm which went quite wide of its mark. "Yes, I'll tell you all about it, children. Alicia and her father, it appears, have been thinking it over. They think—they know, to be sure, for who can have any doubt on the subject?—that I am poor. I am a poor man, with a number of children. A man in my position can not do what he likes, but what he must. I need money to bring you all up, to set you out in the world. Eight of you, you know; that's enough to crush any man," he said.

The girls looked at each other with a look which was half indignant yet half guilty. They felt that somehow they were to blame for being there, for crushing their father. Walter had no such sensation, but yet he recog-

nized the truth of the complaint. He was the eldest, a legitimate, even a necessary party to this question; since but for his existence, in his own opinion, his father's heirship would have been unimportant. But the others were, he allowed to himself, so much ballast on the other side, complicating the question, making a difficulty where there should be none.

"I should have thought," he said, indignantly, "that Sir Walter would have seen how mean it was to take advantage—what a poor sort of thing it was to trade upon a man's disabilities-upon his burdens-upon what he can not throw off, nor get rid of." The state of the state of

Mrs. Penton's mind had been traveling meanwhile upon

its own tranquil yet anxious way.

"Was there any offer made you, Edward? Did she say how much they thought?-wouldn't that be one of the first things to think of? We might be troubling ourselves all for nothing, if they were intending to take advantage, as Walter says. But, then, how should Walter know? They would never take him into their confidence. Was any sum mentioned? for that would show whether they meant to take advantage. I never heard they were that sort of people. Your cousin Alicia has the name of being proud, but as for taking advantage-"

"Can't you see," he cried, with irritation, "that you are driving me distracted, going over and over one set of words? Walter's a fool. Do you suppose the Pentons are cheats? To make such an offer at all was taking an- If we had been as well off as they are they never would have ventured. That's all about it. I never supposed they would try to outwit me in a bargain." After this little blaze of enemgy he sunk into his more usual depression. "If it hadn't been for you and the children of course I shouldn't have listened, not for a moment."

"Why should you do it for us, father? We don't cost so much. We could go away and be governesses, rather than be such a burden!"

Mrs. Penton put down the hand upon which she had drawn the stocking to give Anne a warning touch, while her father took no notice except with a passing glance.

"A man can do himself no justice when he's weighted down on every side. It has always been my luck. I wonder, for my part, now that they have had the assurance to propose it at all, why they didn't propose it years and years

ago.

"What a thing it would have been!" said Mrs. Penton; "many an anxiety it would have saved us, Edward. Why, it would make you a rich man! We have always looked forward so to Penton, and nobody ever supposed Sir Walter would live till eighty-five; but I have never thought of it as such a paradise. For, in the first place, it would want a great deal of money to keep it up."

"Yes, it would take money to keep it up."

"Everybody says it is kept up beautifully. You never could reconcile yourself to neglecting anything, and hearing people say how different it was in Sir Walter's time. Then the house is such a grand house, and it would come to us empty or nearly empty. Oh, I've thought it all over so often. Gentlemen don't go into these matters as a woman does. Of course, your cousin Alicia would take away all the beautiful furniture that suits the house. Her father would leave it to her, for that's not entailed, you know. We should go into it empty, or with only a few old sticks: what should we do with the things we've got in Penton?' She looked round with an affectionate contempt at the well-worn chairs, the table in the middle, the old dingy curtains with no color left in them. "The first thing we should have to do would be to furnish from top to bottom, and where should we find the money to do that?"

Mr. Penton did not say anything. He made a little impatient wave of his hand, but he did not contradict or even attempt to stop her soft, slow, gentle voice as she went on.

"And then the gardeners! they are a kind of army in themselves. To pay them all their wages every week, the men that are in the houses, and the men that are outside, and the people at the lodges, and the carpenters, and the men that roll the lawns; where should we find the money? If we could have the rents and go on living here, of course I don't say anything against it, we should be rich. But to live at Penton we should just be as poor as we are now—as poor but much grander—obliged to give parties and keep horses—and dress— If I ever had ventured to tell you my opinion, Edward, I should have told you, instead of looking forward to Penton it has been my terror night and day. I always thought," she continued, after a pause, "that I

should try and persuade you to let it, until, at least, we

had a little money to the good."

"To let Penton!" The cry burst from them all in every variation of tone, indignant, angry, astonished. To let—Penton! Penton, which had been the golden dream of fancy, the paradise of hope, the one thing which consoled everybody, from Mr. Penton down to Horry, for all that went amiss in life.

"Well?" said the mother, lifting her mild eyes, looking at them for a moment. "I have always thought so, but I would not say it, for what was the use? You all worship Penton, both you and the children. But I never was taken in by it. I have always seen that, however pleasant it might be, and beautiful and all that—and everybody's

prejudices in its favor-we never could keep it up."

She turned round, having delivered her soul, and drew her basket toward her, in which were her needles and the worsted for her darning. She had settled exactly how these big holes were to be attacked, how the threads of the stocking went, and that it must be done in an oblique line to keep the shape. Without a little consideration beforehand, neither stockings can be mended nor anything else done. She had said her say, and no doubt, however it was settled, she would do her best, as well for Penton as for the stocking. And the others watched her without knowing they were watching her. She settled to her work with a little sigh of relief, glad to escape into a region where there could be no two opinions, where everything was straightforward. There was something in this which had a great effect upon the young ones, especially upon Walter, who was the most resistant, the most deeply and cruelly disappointed. There came upon him a great, a horrible consciousness that in all likelihood she was right.

Mr. Penton, as was natural, was not so much impressed. "All that," he said, with a little wave of his hand, "is a truism." He paused, then repeated it again with a sense that he had got hold of a new and impressive word. "It is a truism," he said. "Everybody was aware from the beginning that to keep up Penton as it has been kept up would be impossible. My uncle and Alicia have made a toy of Penton. It would be really better, it would look more like the old house it is, if it were not cleaned up like that, shaven and shorn like a cockney villa. If I were a millionaire I

should not choose to do it. So I don't think very much of that argument." Walter's spirits rose as he followed eagerly his father's utterance. But after a moment Mr. Penton continued, "There is no doubt, on the other side, that living would cost a great deal more than—more than perhaps we—have ever contemplated. There would be the furnishing, as your mother says—I had not thought of

He made the children a sort of jury, before whom the

pro and the con were to be set forth.

"It is beautifully furnished at present—every one says so, at least; that would be a great charge to begin with.
And we might have a good deal to put up with in the confusion that would be made between the poor family and the rich. Your mother is quite right so far as that is concerned; what she doesn't take into consideration is the family feeling—the traditions, the sense that it is ours, and that nobody can have any right to it except ourselves. Alicià, to be sure, is a Penton too, and, as she says, she has been born there, and never has known any other home. But still, as a matter of fact, she has entered another family. It would be an alienation. It has always gone in the

male line. To give it up would be—would be—"

"Father," said Walter, "you couldn't think of it. It
would be like tearing body and soul asunder. Give up
Penton! I think I would rather die."

"What has dying to do with it?" cried the father, impatiently. And then he sat silent for a moment, staring into the fire and twiddling his thumbs, unconscious of what he was doing. The young ones watched him anxiously, feeling with a certain awe that their fate was being decided, but that this question was too immense for their interference. At length he got up slowly and pushed back his chair. "We'll sleep upon it," he said.

CHAPTER X.

AN ADVENTURE.

But Walter, for his part, could not sleep upon it. He followed his father out of the room, he scarcely knew with what intention; perhaps with a hope of further discussion, of being able to open his own mind, of convincing the

wavering mind of Mr. Penton. It seemed to him that he could set it all forth so clearly if only the permission were given him. But Mr. Penton gave his son no invitation to accompany him. He asked where Walter was going, what he meant to do moving about at that hour of the night.

"I think I will take -a little turn, sir," the young man

"You are always taking turns!" said Mr. Penton, with irritation. "Why can't you do something? Why can't you be going on with your Greek?"

There had been nothing said about Greek for some time. What could he mean by alluding to it now? Walter's foreboding mind at once attached significance to this. He thought that his father meant to suggest a return to his abandoned studies by way of preparing for something serious to come of them. But his dismay at the suggestion was not so ungenerous as the looker-on might have supposed. It was not that he was afraid of being made to work. What he was afraid of was that this was but another sign of the abandonment of Penton-of turning aside to other purposes and other views than those which had been

in some sort the religion of his life.

It need scarcely be said that no such idea was in Mr. Penton's mind. He took up the Greek, a missile lying ready to his hand, and tossed it at Walter as he would have flung a stone at a dog which had come in his way in the present perturbed state of his spirits. Having done this, he thought no more of it, but went into his book-room and shut the door with a little emphasis, which meant that he was not to be troubled, but which to Walter seemed to mean that he declined further argument and had made up his mind. The boy stood for a moment groping for his hat, following his father with his eyes, and then rushed out into the night in a turmoil of feeling-indignation, misery, surprise. He had been taken so entirely at unawares. Such a thought as that of being called upon to relinquish Penton had never entered into his mind; it had never occurred to him as a possibility. He knew well enough, whatever any one might say, that to abolish entail was not a thing to be done in a minute. Revolutions in law take time. It was not likely that a man of eighty-five would live long enough to see a change like this accomplished. He had dismissed that idea with scorn; and from what

other quarter could any attack come? Walter had felt himself invulnerable—unassailable in his own right. No son could be more dutiful, more affectionate, less likely to calculate upon his father's death; yet, oddly enough, his father had appeared to him only as a secondary person in this matter—a man with a temporary interest; it was he who was the heir. And—without any fault of his, in complete independence of him, without asking his opinion any more than as one of the children, any more than that of Ally or Anne—his birthright was about to be given away!

A dim evening, soft and damp, and with little light in it, had succeeded the brilliant watery sunset. There was a moon somewhere about, but she was visible only by intervals from among the milky clouds. A sort of pale suffusion of light was in the atmosphere, in which all the chief features of the landscape were visible, but more clearly the house, with all its matted-work of creepers, the lights in the windows, the bare branches rising overhead, with a little sighing wind in them, a wind that moaned and murmured of rain. More rain!-rain that would fill up higher the link of darkly shining water which all but surrounded Penton Hook. The sky was full of it, the atmosphere was full of it; the branches glistened with damp; the very gravel, where you had made an indentation with your heel, filled up with the oozing water, of which the soil was full: and the wind kept sighing with its little lugubrious tone among the branches, saying, "More rain! more rain!" There was a certain moral chill in the air by reason of this, but it was not cold; it was what is called "muggy" on Thamesside. Walter was so well used to it that he made no remark to himself on the damp, nor did he feel the chill. He went crunching along the gravel in his boots, which made a great many indentations, and left a general running of little stray water-gleams behind him, to a certain bench which he had himself made under the tall poplar close to the river bank. It had not been put there because there was shade to be had in the season when shade was wanted, and when it is pleasant to sit out and see the river at one's feet. It was put there for quite a different reason, because when you knew exactly where to look, there was one small corner, the angle of a chimney at Penton, visible among the trees. And there he seated himself to think.

The mother had been right when she said that they had

worshiped Penton. The children had all been brought up in that devotion. It was a sort of earthly paradise, in which they took refuge from all the immediate humiliations and vexations of their lot. To be poor, yet to belong to the class which is rich, is not a comfortable position. Those who in his own estimation were Walter's equals were in every external circumstance more separated from him than were the young farmers about; and yet the farmers would have been put out by his presence among them, and he would have found himself entirely out of his element. He was thus a young solitary belonging to nobody, at home with none of his compeers, without companions or friends of his age. The farmers, had he taken to them or they to him, were better off than he; they had horses to ride, they followed the hunt, they kept dogs that ran in coursing matches. Wat had nothing except, if he pleased, a share now and then of the solid, sturdy little pony-of-all-work, and Elfie, the shaggy little terrier. What youth of twenty could live in the country and see Fred Milton, who had been in his division at Eton, and little Bannister, go by in pink and not feel it? He felt it, and so did Ally feel it when she read Eva Milton's name among the list of the young ladies who were presented and who had been at the court ball. Do you suppose Ally did not wish to see what a ball was like as well as the rest? The farmers' daughters had their dances too, and got beautiful white tulle dresses for them as well as their superiors in rank. But Ally got nothing; neither the one nor the other. They were shut out of everything, these poor young people, and felt it, being made but of ordinary flesh and blood.

But Penton had been amid all this the refuge of their imaginations. They had been told indeed that even when they were in Penton they would be poor. But poverty in such circumstances would be transformed. They would no longer be shut out of everything, they would come within the range of the people who were "like themselves." Walter seated himself at the foot of the poplar-tree, with the river running far too close to his feet, for it was very high, sweeping round with an ominous hurry and murmur, preparing floods to come, and the bare branches overhead rustling and whispering in the wind—and directed his eyes to the high wooded bank, the belt of trees, the Penton chimney corner. He could not see it with his bodily eyes,

but in his soul he saw it dominating the landscape, and saw as in a panorama everything it involved. Sir Walter Penton of Penton was a power in the county, he was not a mere squire like Fred Milton's father, or a lordling of yesterday like Bannister's ennobled papa. Sir Walter Penton of Penton-not the old man who lived shut up in his library, who was taken out for a drive on fine days. Young Walter meant no harm to the old man, but he was himself the Sir Walter Penton whom he had seen in his dreams. What was it he had looked for? Was it only the vulgar improvement, more money to spend, better dinners, horses, travels, all that a young man wants? He had wanted these things, but something more. He had wanted first of all to find himself in his place; to be somebody, not nobody; to recover the importance which was his right, to have all the evils of fortune made up to him. Is not that what the young dream everywhere, whatever their circumstances may be?-to have everything set right, to do away with all the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes. Those who spurn you may not be unworthy, and your own merit may not be patent, or even you may be conscious that you are not meritorious at all. But still we dream, even without such a tangible occasion for dreaming as Walter, of everything being set right.

And now in a moment this hope was all to be cut away. Penton was to be made nothing—nothing to him, no more than any house about, no more than Bannister's fictitious abbey with its new Strawberry Hill cloister, which was founded upon nothing but wealth, whereas there had been Pentons of Penton since the thirteenth century, and most likely long before. And he was the representative of them all! In his veins was concentrated the essence of theirs: and yet he was to be cut off; he was to stand stupid and look on, without even a right to say no, though it was his inheritance. Walter felt the very possibility of thought taken from him in this dreadful catastrophe. He had nothing to do with it! that was what everybody would say. He was not one-and-twenty, but even if he had reached that age he had nothing to do with it, though it meant his very

life.

The tumult of these thoughts overwhelmed the poor young fellow. They carried him away as the river carries everything away when it is in flood, and turned him over

and over and dashed him against stones and muddy projections, and poured waves of bitterness over his head. He sat and bit his nails, and gnawed his under lip, and thought and thought, if there was any way to get out of it, if he could say anything, make any protest to his father, declare his own readiness to go anywhere, do anything, rather than suffer this sacrifice. He might go to Australia-in Australia people make fortunes quickly. He might soon be able to make money, to send home something for the children; or to India, or to the gold fields somewhere where nuggets were still to be had. These thoughts can scarcely be called disinterested, for it was how to save what was more to him than nuggets or fortune that Walter was thinking of; but at all events it was not for himself in the first place that he meant to labor. It was for an ambition altogether visionary after all-for Penton, which meant to him the something better, the something loftier, the ideal of life. As he sat musing, the clouds cleared away a little; there began to be a clear place in the sky; it grew lighter, but he did not remark it-until all at once, without a word of warning, the moon suddenly struck out, and made an outburst of radiant reflection upon the river at his feet which called his attention in spite of himself. He looked up instinctively, by the instinct of long habit, and lo! everything was clear over Penton; the moon shining full, the clouds all floating away in masses of fleecy whiteness, and a weather-cock somewhere blazing out, as if it were made of gold and silver, to the right.

This sudden revelation was too much for the boy. He gave a cry of insupportable indignation, a loud protest and utterance of despair, and then hid his face, as if the white

light had blinded him, in his hands.

"Stay, Martha, look! there's some one on the bank. If it's one of the family what shall I do? or if it's a tramp? Look! either he's gone to sleep and he'll catch his death of cold, or else he's blinded with the moonlight, as people

say."

It was a pretty voice that spoke, with a little catch in it as of mingled fright and audacity: and then followed a slight stir on the gravel as though the speaker had started back at sight of the unlooked-for figure under the tree. "Oh, Martha! what shall I do? I've no business to be here at this time of the night."

"You're doing no harm," said Martha. "The missis will think I was showing a friend round the grounds to look at the moon, and she'll never say a word. It's Master Walter. Hush! Don't you take no notice, and he'll take none. He's often here of nights."

"But he's gone to sleep, and he'll catch his death of cold," the stranger said. "Oh, Martha, you that know him, go and wake him up!"

"Hush, then, come along. It's not cold, only a bit damp, and we're used to that in this house. Come along," Martha said.

Walter heard with an acuteness of hearing which perhaps, had it been only Martha, would not have been his; but the other voice was not like Martha's-he thought it sounded like a lady's voice. And he was pleased by the solicitude about himself. And he was very young, and in great need of some new interest that might call him out of himself. He rose up suddenly, and took a long step after the two startled figures, which flew before him as soon as he was seen to move.

"Hi, Martha! where are you off to? Come back, I tell you. Do you think I'll do you any harm, that you run

from me?"

"Oh, no, sir, please, sir; it's only me and a friend taking a turn by the river afore she goes up to the village. It's a friend, please, sir, as is staying with us at 'ome."

"There's no harm done," said Walter. "You need not run because of me. I'm going in." The two young women had come to a pause in a spot where the moon was shining clearly, showing in a little opening, amid all the tracery of interlacing boughs, of which she was making a shadow pattern everywhere, the square figure of Martha, standing firm, with another lighter, shrinking shadow, slim and youthful, beside her. There was something romantic to Walter's imagination in this unknown, who had shown so much interest in himself. "Going to the village at this hour!" he added. "I hope she is not going by herself."

"Oh, it's of no consequence, sir," said Martha, pulling rather imperatively her companion by the gown.

"Is it a bad road, or are there tramps, or—anything? Oh, Martha!" the other said, in a voice which sounded very clear, though subdued.

"Oh, nonsense, Emmy! It's just like any other road.

It's a bit dark and steep to begin with. But there's noth-

ing to be frightened of."

"Oh, why did I stay so late!" said the other. "How silly of me not to think! No lamps, nor—nor shops, nor people. I never was out on a country road in the dark, Oh, why didn't I think—"

"Don't be silly! It's as safe as safe; there's never no

accidents here." The transfer of the second of the second

"You had better keep your friend with you all night, Martha; my mother will not mind."

"Oh!-but my mother, sir! she would go out of her

senses wondering what had come to me."

"Emmy, don't be a silly. I tell you it's as safe-"

"I have nothing particular to do," said Walter, goodhumoredly. "Since she is so frightened I will walk with her as far as the turnpike. You can see the lights of the village from there."

"Oh, Mr. Walter, I couldn't let you take that trouble. I'd rather go with her myself. I'll run and get Jarvis.

I'll_''

"You need not do anything. It's turned out a lovely night," said Walter, "and I shall be all the better for the walk."

It was all settled in a moment, before he himself knew what was being done, with the carelessness, the suddenness which sometimes decides an all-important event. Walter was seized just at the moment when his own evil fortune seemed overwhelming, when fate seemed to be laying hold on him, with a force which nothing could resist. He was seized by a kind impulse, a good-natured wish to be of use to somebody, to escape from himself in this most legitimate, most virtuous way, by doing something for another. He was pleased with himself for thinking of it. A sense of being good came into his mind, with a little surprise and even amusement such as only an hour ago would have seemed impossible to him. It was like what his mother or one of the girls might have done, but such impulses did not occur readily to himself. He walked round toward the gate by which Martha and her friend stood and whispered together. Martha he could see did not like it; she was shocked to think of her young master having the trouble. The trouble! that was the thing that made it pleasant. He felt for the moment delivered from himself.

"If I am walking too fast for you, tell me," he said, when he found himself upon the road with the small, timid figure keeping a respectful distance at his side.

"Oh, no, sir," but with a little pant of breathlessness,

she said

"I am going too fast-how thoughtless of me! Is that

better? And so you are not used to country roads?"

"I am only a little cockney, sir. I have never been out of London before. It's a bad time to come to the country in the winter: for one forgets how short the days are, and it's silly to be frightened. I am silly, I suppose."

"Let us hope not about other things," said Walter.

"The road is very dark, to be sure."

"Yes, sir," she said, with a little shiver, drawing closer. They were still in the hollow and the hedges were high on either side, and the darkness was complete upon their path, though a little way above the moon penetrated, and made the ascent as white as silver and as light almost as day.

"Should you like," he said, with a little laugh of embarrassment, yet an impulse which gave him a curious pleasure, such as he was quite unfamiliar with, "to hold

on by me?—would you like to take my arm?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

The suggestion seemed to fill her with alarm, and she shrunk away after coming so close. Walter was, on the whole, relieved that she did not take his offer, but he was pleased with himself for having made it, and immensely interested in this little modest unknown, who was unseen as well—this little mysterious being by his side in the dark.

"The wood is very pretty," he said, "although you

can't see it, and there are no lamps."

"You are laughing at me, sir; but if you consider that I never was out of the reach of the lamps before. Hampstead is the furthest I have been, and there are lamps there even on the heath. The darkness is one of the things that strikes me most. It is so dark you can feel it. It's black." She gave another little shiver, and said, after a moment, "I do so love the light."

Her tone, her words, the ease with which she spoke, filled Walter with surprise—a surprise which he expressed without thinking, with a frankness which perhaps he would not have displayed had his companion not been Martha's

friend.

"And what," he said, "can you be doing in our village, and at old Crockford's? I can't understand it. You are

a-you're not a-''

He began to recollect himself when he came this length. To say "you're a lady" seemed quite simple when he began to speak; but as he went on it did not prove so easy. If she was a lady how could he venture to make any such remark?

She gave a little soft laugh which was very pretty to hear. "Old Crockford is-a sort of an uncle of mine," she said.

"Your uncle!"

"Well, no-not quite my uncle, but something a little like it. When I am humble-minded I call him so; when I am not humble-minded-"

"What happens then?"

"I say as little about it as I can; I think as little about it as I can. No," she said, with a little vehemence, "I'm not a lady, and yet I'm not a-Martha Crockford. I am a poor little London cockney girl. You shouldn't be walking with me, sir; you oughtn't to see me home, you, a gentleman's son. People might talk. As soon as we get into the moonlight there, where it is so bright, I will release you and run home."

"Home!" said Walter, incredulous; "it is not possible. Whoever you are—and of course I have no right to ask—I am sure you are a lady. You are as little like the Crockfords as any one could be. No doubt you must have some

reason-"

"Oh, yes," she said, with a laugh, clasping her hands, "a mysterious reason; how can you doubt it? I am a heroine, and I have got a story. I am in hiding from Prince Charming, who wants to run away with me and make me his queen; but I won't have him, for I am too high-toned. I could not have him shock his court and break the queen mother's heart. Every word I say makes you more certain what sort of person I am. Now doesn't it?" she cried, with another laugh.

"I can't tell what sort of a person you are," said Walter, "for I am sure I never talked to any one like you be-

"Well," she said, with a quick breath which might have been a sigh, "I hope that is a compliment. I have been talking to Martha all night, dropping my h's and making

havor with my grammar. It is nice to do the other thing for a little and bewilder some one else. Yes; I am sure this is a pretty road when there is light to see it. One can't see it in the moonlight, one can see nothing for the moon."

"That is true," said Walter; "just as in summer you

can't see the grass for flowers."

"I don't exactly catch the resemblance. What is that lying under the hedge? The shadow is so black, so black now we have got into the light. Look, please; I feel a little frightened. What is that under the hedge?"

"Nothing," said Walter; "only a heap of stones. If you will look back now we have got up here you will see the river and all the valley. The view is very pretty from

here."

He hoped to see her face when she should turn round, for, though the moonlight is deceiving, it is still better than darkness. Even though she had her back turned to the light he could now see something—the round of what was a pretty cheek.

I am sure there is something there under the hedge,

something that moved."

"I will look to satisfy you," said Walter; "but I know

there is nothing. Ah-","

A quick rush, a little patter of steps flying along the white road, were the first indications he had of what had happened. Then, before he could recover himself, a laughing "Good-bye, good-bye, sir. Thank you; I see the village lights," came to him down the road. He made a few steps in pursuit, but then stopped, for the little flying figure was already out of sight. And then he stood looking after her planté la, as the French say. Why, it was an adventure!—such a break as had never happened before in his tranquil life.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GIRLS' OPINION.

THE girls in the drawing-room not only met with no adventure, but they did not even know that the damp atmosphere had cleared up and the moon come out. They did not know what had become of Walter. They were as unaware of his despair as of the sudden amusement which had

come to him to console him in the midst of it. They thought—hoped rather—that he had gone to the book-room with Mr. Penton and was there talking it over, and perhaps undoing the effect of what their mother had said. It did not, indeed, seem very likely that Walter should be able to do this, but yet they were so much on the side of Penton in their hearts that a vague hope that it might be so, moved them in spite of themselves. Walter against mother seemed a forlorn hope; and yet when all your wishes are in the scale it is difficult to believe that these will not somehow help and give force to the advocate. Ally and Anne had taken their places at the table when the gentlemen went away. They were making little pinafores for the children; there were always pinafores to be made for the children. Anne, who was not fond of needle-work, evaded the duty (which to her mother appeared one of the chief things for which women were made) as much and as long as she could, but, being beguiled by promises of reading aloud, did submit in the evening. The little ones used so many pinafores! Ally was always busy at them, except when she was helping in the more responsible work of making little frocks. This evening there was no one to read aloud, but no one blamed Walter for going out; no one even thought of the book, though they were at the beginning of the third volume. Penton for the moment was a more interesting subject than any novel. The girls had not thought so much of it as Walter had done, but still it had been a prominent feature in their dreams also. The idea of being Pentons of Penton could not be indifferent; of taking their place among the aristocracy of the county; of going everywhere, having invitations to all the parties, to tennis in summer, to the dances, all the gayeties, of which now they only heard. Secretly in their souls they had consoled themselves with the thought of this when they heard of the great doings at Milton and all that was done when little Lord Bannister came of age. Anne, indeed, had exclaimed, "If they don't think proper to ask us now they may let us alone afterward, for I sha'n't go!'' But Ally, more tolerant, had taken the other side. "They don't know anything about us; it would be going out of their way to ask us. If they knew we were nice, and didn't ask us because we were poor, that would be horrid of them; but how can they tell whether we are nice or not?" Anne would have

mone of this indulgent argument; she had made up her mind when they came to advancement to revenge all these wrongs of their poverty, so that it was equally hard upon her to have to consent to do without that advancement after all.

Thus they had plenty to talk about as they made their little pinafores. These were made of colored print, which looked cheerful and clean (when it was clean), and wore well, Mrs. Penton thought. Brown holland, no doubt, is the best on the whole, and there is most wear in it, but it is apt to look dingy when it is not quite fresh, and when it is once washed gets such a blanched, sodden look; even red braid fails to make it cheerful. So that Mrs. Penton preferred pink print and blue, which are cheaper than brown holland. The table looked quite bright with those contrasting hues upon it; and the young faces of the girls bending over their work, though they looked more grave and anxious than usual, were pleasant in their fresh tints. Mrs. Penton herself went on with her darning. She had filled up all those great holes, doing them all the more quickly because she had studied the "lie" of them, and how the threads went, before.

"I have never said anything about it," said Mrs. Penton, "for what was the use? I saw no way to be clear of Penton; but I've had this in my mind for years and years. You don't know what an expense it would be; even the removal would cost a great deal: and though we should have a larger income we should have no ready money—not a farthing. And then you know your father, he would never be content to live in a small way, as we can do here, at Penton; he would want to keep up everything as it was in Sir Walter's time. He would want a carriage, and horses to ride. He might even think of going into Parliament—that was one of his ideas once. Indeed, I see no end to the expense if we were once launched upon Penton. We should be finer, and we should see more company, but I don't think we should be a bit better after awhile than if we had never come into any fortune at all."

"But it would always be something to be fine, and to see more company, and to have a carriage, and horses to

ride," said Anne.

"At the cost of getting into debt and leaving off worse than we were before!" said the mother, shaking her head.

Ally let her work drop on the table and looked up with soft eyes. There was a light unusual in them, which shone even in the smoky rays of that inodorous lamp. "Oh," she said, with a long-drawn breath, "mother! it's wicked, I know; and if it made things worse afterward—"

"She thinks just as I do!" cried Anne--" that to have a little fun and see the world, and everything you say,

would be worth it, if it were only for a little while!"

"Oh, girls!" said Mrs. Penton—a mild exasperation was

in her tone—"if you only knew what I know—""

"We can't do that, mother, unless we had experience like you; and how are we to get experience unless we risk something? What can we ever know here?—the hours the post goes out, though we have so few letters, the times they have parties at the abbey, though we're never asked. The only thing we can really get to know is how high the river rises when it's in flood, and how many days' rain it takes to make it level with our garden. Oh, how uncomfortable that is, and how chill and clammy! What else can we ever know at Penton Hook?"

"Oh, girls!" said Mrs. Penton again.

Si jeunesse savait! But this is what will never be till the end of the world. And at the same time there was something in her maternal soul that took their part. That they should have their pleasure like the other girls; that they should have their balls, their triumphs like the rest; that to dress them beautifully and admire their bright looks might be hers, a little reflected glory and pleasure for once in her dim, laborious life-her heart went out with a sigh to this which was so pleasant, so sweet. But then afterward? To give it up was hard-hard upon those who had not discounted it all as she had done, taking the glory to pieces and deciding that there was no satisfaction in it. She felt for her husband and the children, though for them more than for him—but her feeling was pity for a pleasant delusion which could not last, rather than sympathy. Penton itself was to her nothing; she disliked it rather than otherwise as something which had been opposed to her all her life.

"If your father accept this offer," she said after a time, "we need not stay in Penton Hook. We might let it; or at least we might leave it in the winter and go to some other place. We might go to London, or we might even

go abroad; then you would really see the world. If your father had to give up Penton without any advantage that would be a real misfortune. But of course they would give him a just equivalent. Our income would be doubled and more than doubled. Oswald could stay at Marlborough; Walter might go to Oxford. We should be better off at once without waiting for it, and we should be free, not compelled to keep up a large place or spend our money foolishly. You might have your fun, as you call it. Why shouldn't you? We would be a great deal better off than at Penton, and directly—at once. You know what everybody says about waiting for dead men's shoes. Sir Walter may live for ten years yet. When a man has lived to eighty-five he may just as well live to ninety-five. And I am sure if we only could get a little more money to live on, none of us wishes him to die."

"Oh, no," said the girls, one after another. "If it is any pleasure to him to live," Anne added reflectively, after

a pause.

least it seems so. No one wishes to die as long as he can help it. I wonder why myself; for when you are feeble and languid and everything is a trouble, it seems strange to wish to go on. They do, though," said the middle-aged mother with a sigh. She thought of Sir Walter as they thought of her, with a mixture of awe and impatience. They felt that their own eager state, looking forward to life, must be so far beyond anything that was possible to her; just as she felt her own weary yet life-full being to be so far in the range of vitality above him. She drew the stocking off her arm as she spoke, and smoothed it out, and matched it with its fellow, and rolled them both up into that tidy ball which is the proper condition of a pair of stockings when they are clean and mended, and ready to be put on. "I think I will go up to the nursery and take a look at the children," she said. "Horry had a cold; I should like to see that there is no feverishness about him now he is in bed."

Ally and Anne dropped their work with one accord as their mother went away, not because her departure freed them, but because their excitement, their doubt, their sense of the family crisis all intensified when restraint was withdrawn, and they felt themselves free to discuss the

problem between themselves. "What do you think?" they both said instinctively, the two questions meeting as it were in mid career and striking against each other. "I think," said Anne, quickly, not pausing a moment, "that there is

a great deal in what mother says."

"Oh, do you?" said Ally, with an answering look of disappointment; then she added, "Of course there must be, or mother would not say it. But would you ever be so happy anywhere as you would be in Penton? Would you think anywhere else as good—London, or even abroad—oh, Anne, Penton!"

And now it was that Anne showed that skeptical, not to say cynical spirit, that superiority to tradition which had

never appeared before in any of her family.

"After all," she said, "what is Penton? Only a house like another. I never heard that it was particularly convenient or even beautiful more than quantities of other houses. It is very large—a great deal too large for us—and without furniture, as mother says. Fancy walking into a great empty, echoing place, without a carpet or a chair, and pretending to be comfortable. It makes me shudder to think of, whatever you may say."

Ally was chilled much more by Anne's saying it than by the vision thus presented to her. She began hurriedly, "But Penton—" and then stopped, not knowing appar-

ently what to say.

"I begin to be dreadfully tired of Penton," said Anne, giving herself an air of superiority and elderly calmness. "Everybody romances so about that big, vulgar house. Well, anything's vulgar that pretends to be more than it is. One would suppose it was the House Beautiful or else a royal palace at the very least, to hear you all speak. And then poor old Sir Walter, to grudge him his little bit of life! I feel like a vampire," cried Anne, "every day wishing that he may die."

"I am sure," cried Ally, moved almost to tears, "I

don't wish him to die."

"You wish to be at Penton, and you can't be at Penton till he dies," said Anne, triumphantly. "Poor old gentleman! his nice warm rooms that he has taken so much trouble with, and all his pretty things! And to think that a lot of children who will pull everything to pieces should he let in upon them, and his own daughter, who is like

himself, and who would keep everything just as he liked. to see it, should be driven away!"

"I never thought of it in that light before," said Ally,

in a troubled voice. On a general

"Nor I," said Anne; "but it is fair to put yourself in another person's place and think how you would feel if-Mrs. Russell Penton must hate us, naturally. I should if I were she. Fancy if there was some one whose interest it was that father should die!" was now as standard and the should die!"

Oh, Anne!" o nobrol -- boog as sale gradwyr

"It is just the very same only that father is not so old as Sir Walter. Suppose there were no boys, but only you and me, and some other horrible people were the heirs of the entail. How I should hate them! I think I should

try to kill them!" and a dediv

Anne loved an effect, and Ally's softer spirit was the instrument upon which she played. Ally cried "No, no, no!" with a horrified protest against these abominable sentiments. A cloud of trouble gathered over her face; her eyes filled with tears. She put up her hands to stop those dreadful words as they flowed from her sister's mouth.

"To hate any one would be terrible. I could not do that,

nor you either, Anne."

"Not if they wished that father might die?"

This awful supposition overwhelmed Ally altogether. She melted into tears.

"Well, then, come along out into the garden, and don't let's think of it any more. I want a little air—the lamp is so nasty to-night-and I'll finish my pinafore to-morrow. It is very nearly done, all but the button-holes. Do come out and see if the river is rising. That is one good thing about Penton, it is out of reach of the floods. But look, what a change! It is almost as clear as day, and the moon so beautiful. If I had known I should not have stayed indoors in the light of that horrid lamp."

"We must do our work some time," said Ally, faintly, allowing herself to be persuaded. It was rather cold, and very damp; but the moon had come out quite clear, dispersing, or rather driving back into distance the masses of milky clouds which had lost their angry aspect, and no longer seemed to foretell immediate rain. Rain is disagreeable to everybody (except occasionally to the farmers), but it is more than disagreeable to people who live half sur-

rounded by a river; it made their hearts rise to see that the rain-clouds seemed dispersing and the heavens getting clear. And then it takes so very little to lighten hearts of seventeen and eighteen! The merest trifle will do-the touch of the fresh air, even the little nip of the cold which stirred their blood. As they came out Walter appeared, coming back from the gate, a dark figure against the light.

"Oh, Wat, where have you been? Have you been up to the village without telling us? And I did so want a run? Why didn't you call me?"

"Don't, Anne," said Ally; "he is not in spirits for your nonsense. Poor Wat! he can not throw it off like what could be want here! Walter ha

"Ah," said Walter, reflectively; but it seemed to the girls that he had to think what it was he could not throw off. "I have not been up to the village," he said; "only round the dark corner. Martha was there with a little girl who was in a terrible funk. She thought there were lions and tigers under the hedge. I just saw her round the corner."

"How kind of you, Wat! A little girl! But who could e be?"

"I don't know a bit," said Walter, demurely. "It was too dark to see her face."

He thought his own voice sounded a little strange, but they did not perceive it. They came to either side of him,

linking each an arm in his.

sand of them only teste de-

"Come and look at Penton in the moonlight," said Anne, she who was so indifferent to Penton. But somehow to all of them the sting was taken out of it, and there was no pain for them in the sight.

CHAPTER XII.

A NEW FACTOR.

MRS. RUSSELL PENTON did not let the grass grow under her feet. In two or three days after the above events, before Mr. Penton had made up his mind to give any answer, good or bad, another emissary appeared at the Hook. He was a messenger less imposing but more practical than the stately lady who had perhaps calculated a little-more than was justified by the effect produced-upon her own old

influence over her cousin. No influence, save that of mutual interest and business-like arrangement, was in the thoughts of the present negotiator. He drove up to the door in a delightful dog-cart, with a fine horse and the neatest groom, a perfectly well-appointed equipage altogether, such as it is a pleasure to see. He was as well gotup himself as the rest of the turn-out-a young man with a heavy mustache and an air-Anne, who at the sound of this arrival could not be restrained from moving to the window and looking out behind the curtains, pronounced him to be "A Guardsman, I should think." "A Guardsman! how should you know what a Guardsman is like? and what could he want here?" Walter had said, contemptuously. But he too had peeped a little, ashamed of himself for doing so. "A bagman, you mean, coming for orders," he cried; to which his sister retorted with equal justice: "How do you know what a bagman is like? and what orders could he get here?" The two young people were considerably discomfited when the stranger, in all his smartness and freshness, with a flower in his button-hole (in the middle of winter), was suddenly shown in upon them by Martha with the murmur of a name which neither caught, and which, as Anne divined, their handmaiden had mumbled on purpose, not comprehending what it was.

The stranger made his bow and explained that he had come to see Mr. Penton on business; and then he displayed an amiable willingness to enter into conversation with the younger branches of the family. "Your roads are not all that could be desired," he said, finding upon his coat-sleeve an infinitesimal spot of mud. "I am afraid it must be

pretty damp here."

"No, it is not damp," said Walter, promptly.

"Oh!" said the other; and then after a moment he hazarded the observation that the house, though pretty, lay rather low.

"It is not lower than we like it to be," Walter replied. He did not show his natural breeding. He felt somehow antagonistic to this visitor without any reason, divining what his errand was.

"Oh!" said the stranger again; and then he addressed himself to Anne, and said that the weather was very mild for the season, an assertion which the most contradictory could not have denied. Anne had been looking at him with great curiosity all the time. She did not know how to classify this spruce personage She was not at all acquainted with the genus young man, and it was not without interest to her. He was neither a Guardsman nor a bagman, whatever that latter order might be. Who was he? She felt very desirous to inquire. Her reply was, "I am afraid father must be out. Did he expect you to come?" thinking perhaps in this way the stranger might be led into telling who he was.

"I don't know that he expected me. I came on business. There are certain proposals, I believe; but I need not trouble you with such matters. I hope I may be permitted to wait for Mr. Penton, if he is likely to return

soon."

"The best way," said Walter, with an air of knowledge which deeply impressed his sister, "is to write beforehand and make an appointment."

"That is most true," said the other, with suppressed amusement, "but I was told I was almost sure to find Mr. Penton at home."

At this moment the door flew open hastily and Ally appeared, not seeing the stranger as she held the door. "Oh, Wat," she cried, "father has gone out and some one has come to see him. Mamma thinks it is some dreadful person about Penton. She wants you to run out and meet him, and tell him— What are you making signs to me for?"

As she said this she came fully into the room and looked round her, and with a sudden flush of color, which flamed over cheek and brow and chin, perceived the visitor, who made a step forward with a smile and a bow.

"I am the dreadful person," he said. "I don't know what I can say to excuse myself. I had no bad intention, at least."

Ally was so much discomposed that after her blush she grew pale and faint. She sunk into a chair with a murmur of apology. She felt that she would like to sink through the floor; and for once in her gentle life would have willingly taken vengeance upon the brother and sister who had let her commit so great a breach of manners, and of whom one, Anne, showed the greatest possible inclination to laugh. Walter, however, was not of this mind. He

took everything with a seriousness that was almost solem-

nity.
"My sister, of course, did not know you were there,"
that desire to escape from an unhe said. And then, with that desire to escape from an unpleasant situation which is common to his kind, "Since you are in a hurry and your business is serious, I'll go and see if I can find Mr. Penton," he said.

And he had the heart to go, leaving the stranger with Ally and Anne! the one overwhelmed with confusion, the other so much tempted to laugh. It was like a boy, they both reflected indignantly to leave them so. Between Ally, who would have liked to cry, and Anne who restrained with difficulty the titter of her age, the young man, however, felt himself quite at an advantage. He asked with quiet modesty whether he might send his horse round to the stables. "I can send him up to the village, but if you think I might take the liberty of putting him up here—" They were so glad to be free of him, even for a moment, that they begged him to do so, in one breath.

"But for goodness' sake, Ally, don't look so miserable, there is no harm done," said Anne, in the moment of his

absence; "it will show him how we feel about it."

"What does it matter how we feel? but to be rude is

dreadful; let me go and tell mother-''

"What, and leave me alone with him? You are as bad as Wat. You sha'n't stir till father comes. Fancy a strange young man, and an enemy--'

"He need not be an enemy, he is only a lawyer," Ally said, always ready to see things in the most charitable light.

"And what is a lawyer but an enemy? Did you ever hear of a lawyer coming into the midst of a family like this but it was for harm? It was very funny, though, when you bolted in. Wat and I were making conversation; when you suddenly came like a thunder-bolt with your 'dreadful person.' "

In the absence of the injured, Ally herself did not refuse to laugh in a small way. "He does not look dreadful at all," she said; "he looks rather-nice, as if he would have

some feeling for us."

"I don't think his feeling for us could be of much consequence. We are not fallen so low as that, that we should need to care for an attorney's feeling," said Anne. But then her attention was distracted by the fine horse

with its shining coat, the dog-cart all gleaming with care and varnish, notwithstanding the traces of the muddy roads. "He must be well off," she said, "at least," with

a little sigh.

"He is in the law," said Ally; "that doesn't mean the same thing as an attorney. An attorney is the lower kind; and I'm sure it may matter a great deal that he should have feeling. Think of poor Wat's interest. It is Wat that is to be considered; even mother, who is so strong on the other side, and thinks it would be so much better for the rest of us, is sorry for Wat."

"Hush! he is coming back," Anne said. There was something strangely familiar in the return of the visitor through the open door without any formalities, as if he

were some one staying in the house.

"It is very fortunate that the weather is so fine," he said, coming back. "The situation is delightful for the summer, but you must find it unpleasant when the floods are out."

"It is never unpleasant," said Anne; "for it is our home. We like it better than any other situation. Penton is much grander, but we like this best."

"We need not make any comparison," said Ally. "Cousin Alicia prefers Penton because she was born there,

and in the same way we-"

"I understand," the stranger said. But the girls were not clever enough to divine what it was he understood, whether he took this profession of faith in the Hook as simply genuine, or perceived the irritation and anxiety which worked even in their less anxious souls. He began to talk about the great entertainment that had taken place lately at Bannister. "It was got up regardless of expense," he said, "and it was very effective as a show. All that plaster and pretense looks better in the glow of Bengal lights—of course, you were— What am I thinking of? It is not your time yet for gayeties of that kind."

"We were not there," said Anne, in a very decisive tone. Disapproval, annoyance, a little wistfulness, a little envy were in her voice. "We don't go anywhere," she

said.

"Not yet, I understand," said the stranger again. There was a soothing tone about him generally. He seemed to make nothing of the privations and disabilities

of which they were so keenly conscious. "I have a sister who is not out," he went on. "I tell her she has the best of it; for nothing is ever so delightful as the parties you

don't go to, when you are very young."

They paused over this, a little dazzled by the appearance of depth in the saying. It sounded to them very original, and this is a thing that has so great a charm for girls. He went on pleasantly, "There are to be some entertainments, I hear, at Penton when everything is settled. I

hope I may have the pleasure of meeting you there."

"At Penton! we are never at Penton," they cried in the same breath; but then Ally gave Anne a look, and Anne, being far the most prompt of the two, made an immediate diversion. "There is father coming through the garden," she said. It was a principle in the family to maintain a strict reserve in respect to Penton, never permitting any one to remark upon the want of intercourse between the families. It is needless to say that this was a very unnecessary reserve, as everybody knew what were the relations between Sir Walter and his heir. But this is a delusion common to many persons more experienced in the ways of the world than the poor Pentons of the Hook.

Mr. Penton came in making a great noise with his big boots upon the tiles of the hall. He opened the door of the drawing-room and looked in with a nod of recognition which was not very cordial. "Good-morning, Mr. Rochford," he said; "I am sorry I have kept you waiting. Perhaps you will come with me to my room, where we shall be

undisturbed. "Ollas in old

The young man hesitated a little. He made the girls a bow more elaborate than is usual with young Englishmen. "If I am not so fortunate as to see you again before I go—" he said, with his eyes on Ally—and how could Ally help it? She was not in the habit of meeting people who looked at her so. She blushed, and made an inclination of her head, which took Anne, who gave him an abrupt little nod, quite by surprise. "Why," the girl cried, almost before the door closed, "Ally, you gave him a sort of dismissal as if you had been a queen."

"What nonsense!" Ally said, but she blushed once more all over, from the edge of her collar to her hair. "I wonder," she said, "whether Cousin Alicia can leave us

out, if she is going to give entertainments as he says."

"When everything is settled-what does that mean,

when everything is settled?" cried Anne.

"It means, I suppose," said Walter, gloomily, "when Penton has been given over, when we have fallen down among the lowest gentry, just kept up a little (and that's not much) by the baronetcy which they can not take away. Father can't sell that, I believe. Mrs. Russell Penton may be a very great lady, but she can't succeed to the baronetcy. Leave us out! Do you mean to say that—over my body, as it were, you would go!"

"Oh, Walter, don't take it like that! If father settles upon doing this, it will be because both together they have

decided that it is the best."

"And no one asks what I think," cried the lad, "though after all it is I—" He stopped himself with an effort, and without another word swung out again, leaving the door vibrating behind him. And the girls looked at each other with faces suddenly clouded. Fifty looks to twenty so remote an age, so little to be calculated upon. After all, it was Walter, not Mr. Penton, who was the heir.

And no one asked what he thought!

The door of the book-room closed upon the negotiations which were of such importance to the family. There came a hush upon the house—even the winterly birds in the trees without, who chirped with sober cheerfulness on ordinary occasions, were silent to-day, as if knowing that something very important was going on. Those who passed the door of the book-room—and everybody passed it, the way of each individual, whatever he or she was doing, leading them curiously enough in that direction-heard murmurs of conversation, now in a higher, now in a lower key, and sometimes a little stir of the chairs, which made their hearts jump, as if the sitting were about to terminate. But these signs were fallacious for a long time, and it was only when dinner was ready, the early dinner, with all its odors, which it was impossible to disguise, that the door opened at last. The three young people were all about the hall-door, Walter hanging moodily outside, the two girls doing all they could to distract his thoughts, when this occurred. They all started as if a shell had fallen amongst them. By the first glimpse of Mr. Penton's face they were all sure they could tell what had been decided upon. But they were not to have this satisfaction.

"Tell your mother," he said, keeping in the shade, where no one could read his countenance, "to send in a tray with some luncheon for Mr. Rochford and me." And then the door closed, and the discussion within and the mystery and anxiety without continued as before.

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MAN AND WIFE.

"However it goes," said Mr. Russell Penton, "I don't think you can help taking some notice of the young people. In the first place it is right, but that I allow does not count much in social matters; and next it is becoming and expedient, and what the world will expect of you, which is of course much more important."

"Gerald," said his wife, "what have I done to make

you speak to me like that?"

"I don't know that you have done anything, Alicia. It is of course your affair rather than mine. But I think it is hard upon your cousins. It is like that business about the birthright, you know—you have got the mess of pottage, and they—the other thing, half sentimental, half real."

"I wonder at you, Gerald," cried Mrs. Penton. "What true sentiment can they have in the matter? They never lived here; their immediate ancestors never lived here. False sentiment, if you like, as much of that as you like, but nothing else; and the real advantage will be immediate, as you know."

"Yes, I know. I never said it was the sentiment of acquisition; it is the sentiment of personal importance, which perhaps is even more telling. Apart from Penton they will feel themselves nobodies."

"As they are, as they have always been."

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Russell Penton, with a shrug of his shoulders, "I have always said it was your

affair and not mine."

"You never said that you disapproved. You have heard all the conversation that has gone on about it, and yet you have never said a word. How was I to know that you disapproved?"

"I don't disapprove. It is a question between you and

Sir Walter and your relations. It would not become me to thrust in my opinion one way or the other."

Tears came into Mrs. Penton's eyes. "When you say such things, Gerald, you make me feel as if I were no true

wife to you."

fe to you."
"Yes, you are my true wife, and a very dear one," he said, after a momentary pause, without effusion, but with serious kindness. "But we knew, Alicia, when we married, that the position was different from that of most husbands and wives. I am a sort of Prince Consort, to advise and stand by you when I can; but it is my best policy, for my own self-respect as well as your comfort, not to interfere."

"The Prince Consort was not like that," she said; "he was the inspiration of everything. It was not in the nature of things that anything could be done or thought of with-

out him."

"I have not that self-abnegation," he said; "there is but one like that in a generation; besides, my dear, you are not the queen. You must defer to another's guidance. What is settled between Sir Walter and you is for me sacred. I make any little observations that occur to me, but not in the way of advice. For example, I permit myself to say that it is hard on your cousin, because I think you don't quite appreciate the hardship on his side—not to prevent you carrying out your own purpose, which I don't doubt is good and very likely the best."

She shook her head doubtfully. "You are very kind and very tolerant, Gerald, but all you say makes me see that you would not have done this had you been in my

place."

He paused a little before he replied.

"It is very difficult for me to imagine myself in your place, Alicia. A man can not realize what it would be to be a woman, I suppose. But I'll tell you what I should have done had I been in Sir Walter's place, with one dear daughter and an heir of entail—I should have moved heaven and earth to kick him out or buy him out. There can be no doubt as to what I should have done in that

Alicia took his hand and held it in both hers. She looked gratefully into his face, and said. "Dear Gerald!" but yet she turned away unsatisfied, with a haunting sus-

picion. Being Sir Walter, that was what he would have done. But he thought the woman who was his wife should not have done it. In no way had Russell Penton intimated this to be the case. He had never said that a woman should have a different standard of duty set up for her. But Alicia had intuitions which were keener than her intelligence, just as she had longings for approval and sympathy which went far beyond her power of communicating the same. He would have liked her better if she had not grasped at Penton. Without any aid of words this was what she divined. The blank of the doubt which was in her made her heart sore. She wanted to carry his sympathy with her, at any cost. She called after him as he was going away,

"As you are so much concerned about those young people, I will ask them. I will ask them, to please you; if you like, next week, when the Bromley Russells are here."

He looked at her for a moment with something like a stare of surprise; then his countenance relaxed; a smile came over his face.

"Why not?" he said. "Bado shall van alam I

"Why not? There can be no reason against it if you

This time Russell Penton laughed out.

"No," he said, "no reason; the other way. Let the young fellow have his chance."

"What chance?" Alicia stiffened in spite of herself. His laugh offended her, but she would not show her offense, nor inquire what he meant, in case that offense might be increased. "I was not thinking," she added, "of any young fellow. I was thinking of the girls."

"If my wish has weight with you, let the boy come, too.

The sisters will want a chaperon, don't you know?"

"The sisters?" said Mrs. Penton. An inexpressible sense of dislike, of displeasure, of repugnance came over her, as if some passing wind had carried it. "Not that sharp girl," she said, with a look of fastidious dissatisfaction—something that moved the lines of her nostrils as if it offended a sense.

"Not the sharp girl, and not the boy," said Russell

Penton. "But then who is left?"

"My godchild is left, Alicia, the one I like best; or, rather, whom I-',

"Dislike least," said her husband, with his laugh. "I can not see, now that everything is likely to be settled to your satisfaction, what possible reason there can be for disliking them at all."

"There is none," she said, with an effort. "I am the victim of a state of affairs which is over; I can not get my feelings into accordance with the new circumstances. You can not blame me, Gerald, more than I blame myself."

He said nothing at all in reply to this, but turned away as he had done with the intention of going out, when she called him back. Once more she recalled him, with the same dull sense of his disapproval aching at her heart.

"Gerald, after all, you see I do not even wait till things are settled to ask the children. Give me a little credit for

that."

"You said, Alicia, that it was to please me."

"And so it is! and so are many things-more, a great

many more, than you think."

He put his hands upon her shoulders and looked into her face. "You are always very good, very kind, and ready to please me. Is it for that I am to give you credit? or for generosity toward your young cousins? You are not very logical, you see."

"Women are not supposed to be logical," she said.

He gave a grave smile as he took his hands away. "Women are more logical than they acknowledge," he

said. "It is a convenient plea."

And this time there was no recall. He went out without any further hinderance, not much pleased with himself, and perhaps less with her. He was not, as she divined, satisfied at all. Rich Mrs. Penton's husband had as little devotion to Penton as had poor Mr. Penton's wife. He felt that he would have been more at his ease in any other house, and a subtle sort of rivalry with Penton, antagonism partly irrational, and disappointment in the thought that Sir Walter's death, when it came, would bring him no enfranchisement, filled his mind with an irritation which it was not always possible to keep under. He did not want her to do this scanty justice to her young relations, her only relations, in order to please him. They had done no harm; why should it be an offense to her that they had in their veins a certain number of drops of kindred blood? Presently, however, this irritation turned into displeasure with

himself. He had been hard upon Alicia; he had asked that the young Pentons should be invited, vaguely, without any particular meaning; and she had said she would ask them at once, along with the heiress, the great prize for whom so many were contending. It had jarred upon her when he laughed, and it now occurred to him that his laugh had been ill-timed and out of place; yet all alone as he was, when it came back to his mind he laughed again. Why not? he had said—and why not? he repeated with a gleam of humor lighting up thoughts which were not particularly pleasant in themselves. He, a poor scion of the Russells, had carried off the Penton heiress; why should not young Penton, the poor and disinherited, have a try at the other, the Russell heiress? But if Alicia saw the reason of his merriment, no wonder that it had jarred upon her. It was in bad taste, he said to himself. To compare her with the little Russell girl was a thing which even in thought was offensive. He did not wonder that she was offended by his laugh, that it made her stiff and cold. He sighed a little as all inclination to laugh died out of him. It would have suited him better to have had a mate of a lighter nature, one who would have let him laugh, who would have been less easily jarred, less serious, less full of dignity; but this was a thing that Russell Penton was too loyal even to say to himself. It might touch the surface of his thoughts, but only to be banished. It was because of this inevitable jar, this little difference, which was so little yet was fundamental, that he sighed.

And she sighed, too, she who did so many things to please him—more, far more than he had any idea of. She was ready to do almost anything to please him; almost, yet with a great reserve. Instinctively she was aware that Penton stood between them—that the bondage of the great house which was not his, and the burden of representing a family of which he was only, so to speak, an accidental member, lay very heavy upon the easy mind and cheerful, humorous nature of her husband. He was not born to be the head of a house. What he liked was the case of a life without responsibilities, without any representative character. A cheerful little place with all its windows open to the sun, where he could do what he liked, where no man could demand more of him than to be friendly and agreeable which he could leave when he chose and

come back to as he pleased; that would have been his ideal home. She said to herself that the wife whom he had taken to such a little house would have been very happy, and sometimes, in the days when she still indulged in dreams (which women do in the strangest way, long after the legitimate age for it), she had seen that tiny place in a vision with children about it and no cares (as if that were possible!) and Gerald's countenance always beaming with genial content. But the woman who was so happy, who was at her ease, whom no troubles touched, who was Gerald's other self, was not Alicia. She had to sigh and turn away, feeling that this could never be. Her life had been already settled when she married. There was no change or escape for her; indeed, what was stranger still, though she perceived the happier possibilities in the other lot, she knew that it had never been possible to her. The ease would have wearied, perhaps even disgusted her. Attending that vision of happiness would come revelations of the slipshod, glimpses of what ease and happiness so often come to when they grow to overluxuriance. No, the difference was very slight, but it was fundamental. And in this, as in so many other contradictions of life, the woman had the worst of it. Russell Penton was tolerant by nature, and he had trained himself to still greater tolerance. He made an observation, as he said, now and then, but it was possible to him to stand by and look on, without worrying himself about that which he could not change. He would say to himself that it was no business of his; he could even refrain from criticism except in so far as we have seen, when he made a good-natured protest in defense of some one wronged, or avenged another's injury by a laugh. Alicia, on her side, was not so easily satisfied. She wanted him to approve; his acquiescence, his plea that it was not his affair, his declaration that he would not interfere, were to her gall and bitterness. She could not adopt his light ways, nor take things easily as he did. Following her own course, acting upon her own principles, his concurrence, his approval, were the things she longed for before all others. When he said "You are quite right" she was happy, though even then never without a sense that he must have added within himself, "right from your own point of view." The curious thing, however, and one which she was also aware of with a strange double consciousness, was that she never thought of adopting his point of view, or attempting even any compromise between his and hers. She had placed herself so completely in her own groove that she could not get out of it, and had no wish to get out of it. But yet she wanted his approval, all the same. She wanted it passionately, with an insistance which even her own complete enlightenment as to the difference between them never affected. Having her own way, even in the supreme question which now at the last had been opened only to promise the most satisfactory solution, she yet would have no real pleasure in it unless he approved. And his mode of passing it over, his assent which meant no approval, took the pleasure out of everything. What could she do to please him more than she was doing? But she never had it, that satisfaction of the heart. would have wearied, perhaps even disgusted her.

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ing that vision of happiness would come revelations of the

AS A TRANSITION PERIOD.

Mr. Penton's long interview with the young solicitor had ended in this:—and though it did not seem exactly a settlement of the question, it had been taken for granted by both families as such—that he consented to treat with Sir Walter Penton. The terms might take a longer time to arrange, and there were conditions—some of a rather peculiar character, as his opponents thought-which Mr. Penton insisted upon. But upon the general question he was supposed to have yielded. It had taken him a great deal of thought, and he was not happy about it. He went about the house and his few fields with a moody countenance, avoiding every turn or point of view which revealed Penton—those points of view which had once been his happiness. This fact alone took a great deal of the pleasure out of his life. It had been his relief in former days to mount the road to that corner where the view was, or to go out and sit on the bench under the poplar-tree; but now he turned his back upon these favorite places. When he was low he had no longer this way of escaping from himself. Of all points of the compass, that on which Penton lay had become the most distasteful to him. He would have liked to have had it blotted out from the landscape altogether; there was nothing but pain in the sight of it, in the mere

knowledge that it was there. And winter is cruel in this particular. It spares you nothing-not even a chimney. The weather-cock, glowing through the bare trees, seemed to catch every ray of light and blazon it over the whole country; the windows that faced the south were in a perpetual scintillation. The great house would not be hidden; it made no account of the feelings of those who were in the act of parting with it forever; though its aspect was now a reproach and humiliation to them instead of a pride it seemed to force itself more and more on their eyes. Walter felt this almost more strongly than his father, if that were possible. He, too, went about moody, with the air of a man injured, turning his back on the once favorite quarter where the sunset was. He said in his haste that he never wanted to see a sunset again, and when the girls called his attention to all the stormy gorgeous colors of the winter afternoon, would turn his back upon them and declare that the reflection in the river, the secondary tints in the cold gray of the east, were enough for him. He said this with a vehemence which his father did not display. But Walter had solaces and alleviations of which his father was incapable; and Mr. Penton was the one who felt it most deeply after all. In his middle-aged bosom the tide of life was not running high. He had few pleasures; even few wishes. It no longer moved him in his habitual self-restraint that he had no horses, no means of keeping his place among his peers. All that had dropped away from him in the chill of custom—in that acceptance of the inevitable which is the lowest form of content. But there had always been Penton in which his imagination could take refuge. Penton was still an earthly paradise into which one day or other he should find entrance, which nobody could close from him. And now that too was closed, and his fancy could no longer go in and dwell there. He said very little about it, but he felt it to the bottom of his heart. It was the sort of thing of which he might have died had the floods been out or the atmosphere as deleterious as it sometimes was; but happily it was not an exceptionally wet season, and the river had not as yet been "out" that year.

The ladies from the first had taken it better, and they continued to do so. Mrs. Penton began to make calculations with bated breath and many a "hush!" when either father or son were nigh—of what she would now be able to

do. She thought it would be well for them all, as soon as matters were settled, to go away; for though the waters were not out yet, it was scarcely to be hoped for that they should not after Christmas, in rainy February at the latest, have their way; and a separation from the scene of their disappointment would, she thought, be good both for Mr. Penton and Wat. Mrs. Penton said this with a sigh, feeling already all that was involved in a removal in the middle of winter; but it would be good, she felt, for Horry and the rest to be out of the damp, and it would be very good for Wat. The thing for Wat would be to go to Oxford without delay; fortunately he was not too old, and that would take him off thinking about Perton if anything would. As for the father, there was no such panacea for What can be done to distract or divert a man who has outlived the ordinary pleasures, and can not have his mouth stopped or his heart occupied with any new toy? A horse or two such as he would now be able to afford would have done a great deal for him once; but now he had got out of the habit of riding, and might not care to take it up again. It was easier to think of the young ones whose life lay all before them, and who would enter the world now under so much better conditions, though not those they had calculated upon. Mrs. Penton made up her mind that if all was settled on the terms proposed she would be able to give the girls "every advantage." They should be taken to see a great many things, they should have clothes and surroundings that suited their condition; they might even "see a little of the season" when the proper time came round. All these things were pondered and decided upon in the many hours when the feminine portion of the household sat together, which were more than had ever been before. For Wat did not care to have his sisters constantly with him as he once had done; they set it down to his disappointment about Penton, and the disturbance of his temper and of his life which had ensued—which when they accused him of it he agreed in with a sort of satisfaction. But when Anne said, without thought, "One would think Wat had found somebody else to go with him," he was very angry, and grew very red, and demanded to know who else? who was he likely to have else? with an indignation which the provocation did not justify.

Thus it will be seen that the circumstances of the house-

hold were much changed. They had not been in a very flourishing condition when they first discussed the law of entail and the possibility that it might be attacked by a reforming parliament and their birthright taken from them; but somehow that simple time of expectation and depression, which now looked as if it might be years ago, had been, with all its straitenedness, a happier time than now. A certain agitation had got into all their veins; the girls and their mother sat mostly alone in the evenings. There was no reading aloud. Wat was out almost always, taking a walk, he said; or when he was not out he was in the book-room, grinding, as he told them, at his Greek, which was quite necessary if he was going up to Oxford in the beginning of the year. The girls would have thought this state of affairs insupportable a little while ago, but in the commotion of the approaching change they found so much to talk of that they were partially reconciled to making pinafores all the evening in the light of the paraffine lamp, though it smelled badly, and there was no one to read to them. They had a great deal to talk about. As for Mrs. Penton, her mouth was opened as it had never been in her life before. She talked of balls, and theaters, and of the "things" they must get as soon as ever matters were settled. She recounted to them her own experiences—the dances she had gone to before her marriage, and all the competition there had been to secure her for a partner. "They said I was as light as a feather," she said, with her eyes fixed upon the stocking she was darning, and without raising her head; "and so they will say of Ally, for Ally is just the same figure I was. But you must have some lessons when we go to town." She was pleased thus to talk, recalling old recollections, to which the girls listened with astonishment; for they had never supposed that their mother knew anything of those gayeties, which to themselves were like the fables of golden isles unknown to men; but they were not displeased to listen, weaving into the simple story as it flowed the imaginations, the anticipations which filled that unknown world upon the threshold of which they stood. It was even more absorbing than the stories of the good and fair heroines (for Mrs. Penton was very particular in her choice of the books which were read by them) to which they had been in the habit of listening. But they missed Wat, to whom, however, they allowed the

narration of mother's tales might have seemed a little flat had he been there. Wat up to the present moment had shown very little interest in anything of the kind; but it was a little strange now that he should so often be "taking a turn" even when the moon was not shining, and when

the country roads were so dark.

Mr. Rochford, the solicitor, came on several occasions during this time of transition. He came often enough to make the children quite familiar with that trim and shining dog-cart, and the horse which was so sleek and shining, too. Horry had been driven round and round in it, nay, had been allowed to drive himself, making believe, before it was put up; and he and his smaller brother assisted at the harnessing and unharnessing of this famous animal with the greatest enthusiasm every time he came. Young rustic lads attending at a monarch's levée could not have been more interested than were these babes. And Mr. Rochford made himself more or less agreeable in other ways to the whole family, except Wat, who did not take to him, but kept him at a distance with an amount of unfriendly temper which he showed to no one else. There was no idea now of a tray carried into the book-room when this visitor came. He was introduced to the early dinner where all the children sat in their high chairs, and where the food was more wholesome than delicate—a meal which was too plainly dinner to be disguised under the name of luncheon. Mr. Rochford made himself quite at home at this family dinner. He praised everything, and declared that he was always most hungry at this hour, and eat so heartily that Mrs. Penton took it as a personal compliment; for though Mrs. Penton sometimes made a little moan about the appetites of the children, she yet was much complimented when visitors (who were so few at the Hook) eat well and seemed to relish the simple food. "Roast mutton may be very simple," she said, "but there is roast mutton and roast mutton-a big, white, fat leg half cooked is a very different thing from what is set on our table, for I must say that Jane, if she is not much to look at, is an excellent cook." She liked to see people eat; not Horry getting three helps and gorging himself; that was a different matter altogether; but a visitor who could appreciate how good it really was.

And after dinner was over Mr. Rochford would ask whether he might not to be taken round the garden to see,

not the flowers, for there were none, but the flood-marks of different years, and how high the river had come on the last occasion when the waters were "out." He had a great interest in the floods—more than Mr. Penton, who got weary of his guest's enthusiasm, and stole back to the book-room, leaving him with the girls; and more than Anne, who heard her mother calling her, or found she had something to do in the poultry-yard, every time this little incident occurred. Ally was the most civil, the most long-suffering, and it soon became evident that there was only one who had patience to conduct Mr. Rochford to see the flood-marks.

"I have been used to them all my life," the young lawyer said. "I have an old aunt who lives as close to the river as this, and who has the water in her garden every year. I used to be sent on visits there when I was a child, and oh! the transports of the inundation and the old punt in which we used to float about. To come up under the windows in that punt was bliss."

"You could not do that here," said Ally, with that pride in the Hook which was part of the family character. The water never comes above the garden. I showed you the highest flood-mark was on a level with the terrace

round the house."

"Yes," said the visitor, with an implicit faith which was not universal among those who heard this tale. "What a piece of good fortune that is! You must feel as if you were in an oasis in the midst of the desert."

Ally felt that the metaphor was not very appropriate, but of course she knew what he meant. She said, "The little boys are as fond of seeing the floods as you were when

you were a boy."

"It would be difficult work if at any time the house was cut off—I beg your pardon," said Rochford, "that is non-sense, of course; but do you know I dreamed the other night that the river was higher than ever had been known, and was sweeping all round the Hook, and that the family were in danger? I got out in my boat on the wildest whirling stream, and steered as well as I could for your window. Which is your window, Miss Penton? I knew quite well which it was in my dream, and steered for it. That one! why then I was right, for that was where I steered."

"You frighten me," said Ally, "but the water has never

come near the house."

"It did on this occasion. There were people at all the windows, but I steered for yours. I heard myself calling Miss Penton, and you wouldn't let me save you. You kept putting the children into my arms, and I could not refuse the children—but I shall never forget the horror with which I woke up, finding that you always delayed and delayed and would not come."

"How kind of you," said Ally, laughing, but with a little blush, "to take so much trouble even in your dream."

"Trouble!" he cried, "but yet it was great trouble, for you would not come. I heard myself calling, trying every kind of argument, but you always pushed some one in front of you to be saved first, and would not come yourself. I awoke in a dreadful state of mind, crying out that it was my fault, that it was because of me, that if it had been any one else you would have come."

"How ungrateful you must have thought me," said Ally, blushing more and more, "but of course I should have put the children first. You may be sure that is what

I shall do if it should ever come true."

"I am forewarned," he said, laughing. _"I shall know how to beguile you now that I am informed."

"I hope you may never have the occasion," she said.

"Of helping you? Do you think that is a kind wish, Miss Penton? for it is a thing which would be more de-

lightful than anything else that could happen to me.'

Ally, being a little confused by this continuance of the subject, led him round by the edge of the river to the poplar-tree and the bench underneath. "We used all to be very fond of this seat," she said, "because of the view. If Penton is going now to be nothing to us we must take the bench away."

"Can it ever cease to be something to you? It is the

home of your ancestors."

"Oh, yes; but one's father is more near one than one's ancestors, and if he is to have nothing to do with Penton—"

"You regret Penton," said the lawyer, fixing his eyes upon her; "then I wish my hand had been burned off before I had anything to do with the business."

"Oh, what could that matter?" cried Ally. "I am no-

body; and besides," she added, with gravity, "I do not suppose it could have been stopped by anything that either

you or I could do. " you be done to mos

This made the young man pause; but whatever was disagreeable in it was modified by the conjunction "you and I." Was it only civility, or had she unconsciously fallen into the trap and associated herself with him by some real bond of sympathy? He resumed after a pause, "Perhaps we might not be able to cope with such grandees as your father and Mrs. Russell Penton, but there is nothing so strong as—as an association—as mutual help, don't you know?" of bisa yllereneg eldoed nealt erom

Ally did not know, neither did he, what he meant. She replied only, "Oh!" in a startled tone, and hurriedly changed the subject. "Will it take a long time to draw out all the papers, Mr. Rochford? Why should it take so long? It seems so simple."

"Nothing is simple that has to do with the law. Should you like it to be hurried on or to be delayed? Either thing

could be done according as it pleased you."

There was the slightest little emphasis upon the pronoun, so little that Ally perceived it first, then the next moment blushed with shame at having for a moment allowed herself to suppose that it could be meant.

"Oh, we could not wish for either one thing or another," she said. "I shall be sorry when it is altered, and I shall

be glad. Naturally it is Walter that feels it most."

Ah, he is the heir."

"He was the heir, Mr. Rochford. I feel for him. He has to change all his ways of thinking, all that he was looking forward to. But why should we talk of this? I ought not to talk of it to any stranger. It is because you have so much to do with it, because you—"

"Because I am mixed up with it from the beginning," he said, regretfully. "How kind you are to receive me at all, when it was I whose fate it was to introduce so painful a subject. But one never knows," he went on, in a lower tone, "when one drives up to a door that has never been opened to one's steps before, what one may find there; per-haps the most commonplace, perhaps "—he turned his head away a little, but not enough to make the last two words, uttered in a lowered but distinct voice, inaudible to Ally—" perhaps one's fate."

The girl heard them, wondered at them, felt herself grow pale, then red. There is something in words that mean so much, which convey a sort of secondary thrill of comprehension without revealing their meaning all out. Ally, who was unprepared for the real revelation, felt that there was something here which was not usual to be said, which concerned her somehow, which made it impossible for her to continue the conversation calmly. She turned away to examine some moss on the trunk of the nearest tree. Did he mean her to hear that? Did he mean her not to hear? And what did it mean? His fate—that must mean something, something more than people generally said to each other while taking a turn round the garden, whether it might be to see the roses or to examine the flood-marks.

At this moment the most fortunate thing occurred—a thing which ended the interview without embarrassment, without any appearance of running away upon Ally's part. Mrs. Penton suddenly appeared in the porch, which was within sight, holding a letter in one hand and beckoning with the other. She called, not Ally, but "Alice!" which in itself was enough to mark that something had occurred out of the common. Her voice thrilled through the still damp air almost with impatience; its usual calm was gone; it was full of life, and haste, and impetuosity-more like the quick voice of Anne than that of the mother. And then little Horry came running out, delighted to escape outof-doors in his pinafore, without cap or great-coat, or any wrap, his red stockings making a broken line of color as he ran along the damp path, his curls of fair hair blowing back from his forehead.

"Ally! Anne!—Ally! Anne!" he cried, "mother wants you! Ally-Anne! mother wants you!—she wants you bovth. She's got news for you bovth. Ally-Anne! Ally-Anne!"

shouted the small boy.

"I'm coming, Horry," cried the girl; and from the other side of the house came the same cry from her sister. Ally entirely forgot Mr. Rochford and his fate. She ran home, leaving him without another thought, encountering midway Anne, who was flying from the poultry-yard, in which she had taken refuge. What was it? At their age, and in such simplicity as theirs, a letter suddenly arrived with news might mean anything. What might it not mean? It might mean that the queen had sent for them to Wind-

sor Castle. It might mean that some very great lady unheard of before had invited them on the score of some old unknown friendship. It might mean that somebody had left them a fortune. The only thing it could not mean was something unimportant. Of that only they were assured.

Mrs. Penton stood at the door in her excitement, with the letter in her hands. Her tall figure was more erect, her head borne higher than usual. When she saw the girls running from different directions she turned and went indoors, and presently Walter appeared in answer to another summons, walking quickly up to the door. Young Rochford, standing under the poplar looking at them, felt ridiculously "out of it," as he said. It would have pleased him to feel that he had something to do with the family, that their consultations were not entirely closed to him. He had been so much mixed up with it—all the details of their future means, every bit of land which they relinquished, every penny of that which they got as compensation, would pass through his hands. He had beeen feeling of late as if he really had a great deal to do with the Pentons. But here arose at once a matter with which he had nothing to do, upon which he could not intrude himself, to which he was left as much a stranger as though he did not know exactly what their income would be next year. He went slowly into the book-room, with feelings that were utterly unreasonable, though not without the excuse of being natural. The book-room, that was his place, and Mr. Penton and the formal business. But he must not even ask what was the other business which was so much more interesting, the letter which had been sent to Mrs. Penton, which the young ones had been called in such excitement to hear, and no doubt to give their opinions on. He had certainly no right to have an opinion on the subject, whatever it might be. He was only the solicitor managing an external piece of business—and treated with great civility and kindness but nothing more. How could he be anything more?

CHAPTER XV.

THE INVITATION.

MRS. PENTON was in a condition of excitement such as had never been seen in her before. She could not lay down the letter. She could not speak. She went at length and

seated herself in the high chair—in the chair which her husband occupied at any great domestic crisis, when a council of the whole family was called. As her usual seat was a low one, and her usual aspect anything but judicial, there was no change which could have marked the emergency like this. It was apparent that in Mrs. Penton's mind a moment had arrived at which some important decision had to be come to, and for which she herself and not her husband was the natural president of the family council. The young ones were a little awed by this unusual proceeding. There was not a stocking, nor a needle, nor even a reel of cotton within reach of her. She had given herself up to the question in hand. It might be supposed that the decision about Penton, which she took her share in powerfully, while considering all the time how to do that darning, was as important a matter as could come within her ken; but in her own opinion the present issue was more exciting. She had taken that calmly enough, though with decision; but about this she was excited and anxious, scarcely able to restrain herself. The girls ran in, saying, "What is it, mother?" but she only motioned to them to sit down and wait; and it was not till Walter had followed with the same question that Mrs. Penton cleared her throat and spoke.

"It is a letter I have just had," she said--" I have not even talked it over with your father. You were the first

to be consulted, for it concerns you."

And then she stopped to take breath, and slowly unfolded her letter.

"This," she said, "is from Mrs. Russell Penton. It is an-invitation; for two of you: to go to Penton upon a

visit—for three days."

There was a joint exclamation—joint in the sense that the sound came all together, like a piece of concerted music, but each voice was individual. "An invitation—to Penton!" cried Anne. "From Cousin Alicia?" said Ally; and "Not if I know it!" Walter cried; from which it will be seen that the one quite impartial, and ready to consider the matter on its merits, was Anne alone.

"Don't come to any hasty decision," said Mrs. Penton, hurriedly; "don't let it be settled by impulse, children, which is what you are so ready to do."

"Surely," said Walter, "when it's a mere matter of

amusement, impulse is as good a way of deciding as another. I say 'Not if I know it,' and that is all I mean to say.'

"And, unless you say I'm to go, mother, I think like

Wat," said Ally, with unusual courage.

"Children, children! In the first place it's not amusement, and your cousin has never asked you before. She is a great deal richer, a great deal better off than we are. Stop a little, Ally and Wat. I don't say that as if being rich was everything; but it is a great deal. You will meet better society there than anywhere else. And even though your father is going to part with Penton, you never can separate yourselves from it. We shall be called Pentons of Penton always, even though we never enter the house."

"Mother," said Wat, "you don't feel perhaps as I do; that is the best of reasons why I should never enter the house. So long as I was the heir, if they had chosen to ask me it might have been my duty; but now—" cried Wat, his voice rising as if into a salvo of artillery. Unutterable

things were included in that "now."

"Now," said his mother, "because we are giving up, because we are leaving the place, so to speak, it is now much more necessary than ever it was. Your cousins have done nothing that is wrong. They don't mean to injure you; they are doing a very natural and a very sensible thing. Oh, I am not going to argue the question all over again; but unless you wish to insult them, to show that you care nothing for them, that their advances are disagreeable to you, and that you don't want their kindness—" Mother," said Walter, "not to interrupt you, that is

exactly what I want to do."

And Ally had her soft face set. It did not seem that the little face, all movable and impressionable, could have taken so fixed a form, as if it never would change again.

"You want to insult the people, Walter, who are, to be-

gin with, your own flesh and blood."

"Cousins—and not full cousins—are scarcely so near as

that," said Anne, with an air of impartial calm.

"To insult anybody is bad enough, if they were strangers to you—if they were your enemies. What can be nearer than cousins except brothers and sisters? I say Mrs. Russell Penton is your own flesh and blood, and I don't think it is very nice of you, on a subject which I must know bet-

ter than you do, to contradict me. Your father calls Sir Walter uncle. How much nearer could you be? And if you live long enough, Wat, you will be Sir Walter after him. In one sense it is like being grandson to the old gentleman, who lost his own sons, as you know well enough. And is it he you would like to insult, Wat?"

This made an obvious and profound impression. The audience were awed; their mutinous spirit was subdued. The domestic orator pursued her advantage without more

than a pause for breath.

"I never knew the boys: but when I saw the Pentons first everybody was talking of it. Your father had never expected to succeed, oh, never! It was a tragedy that opened the way for him. They had no reason to expect that a young cousin, a distant cousin" (this admission was no doubt contradictory of what she had just said, but it came in with her present argument, and she did not pause upon that), "should ever come in. If they had hated the very sight of those who were to take the place of their own, who could wonder? I should if—oh, Wat, if it were possible that—Osy and you "—she paused a little—" I feel as if I should hate Horry even in such a case."

The impression deepened, especially as she stopped with a low cry, to wring her hands, as if realizing that impossi-ble catastrophe. Walter was entirely overawed. He saw the unspeakable pathos of the situation in a moment. Supposing Horry-Horry! should come in to be the heir, something having happened to Oswald and to himself!
"Don't agitate yourself, mother," he said, soothingly;

"I see what you mean."

"And yet you would like to insult these poor people, to refuse to see how hard it was for them, and what they have had to bear, oh, for so many years!''
Having thus broken down all opposition, Mrs. Penton

made a pause, but presently resumed.

"And then from our side, children, there's something to be said. I wish you to accept the invitation. I wish it because after all it's your own county, and you're of an age to be seen, and you ought to be seen first there. When all this is settled your father will be in a position to take you into society a little. We shall be able to see our friends. If I have never gone out, it has been for that—that I could not invite people back again. Now I may have it in my

power more or less to do this. And I want you to be known-I want you to be seen and known. It is of great importance where young people are seen first. I can't take you to court, Ally, which is the right thing, for we never were in circumstances to do that ourselves. And the next best thing is that you should be seen first in the house of the head of your family. Now all that is very important, and it has got sense in it, and you must now allow an impulse, a hasty little feeling, to get the better of what is sensible and reasonable—you must not indeed. It would be very unkind to me, very foolish for yourselves, very harsh and unsympathetic to the Pentons. And you have a duty to all these. To them? oh, yes, to them too, for they are your relations, and they are old, and though they are prosperous now, things went very badly with them. Besides, it would be as if you disapproved of what your father was doing and envied them Penton: which I suppose is the last thing in the world you would have them to see."

"Disapproving father is one thing," said Wat, "but all the rest I do, and I don't care if they know it or not. Penton ought to be mine. You and my father don't think so—at least you think there are other things more important."

Mrs. Penton looked at her boy from her husband's judicial chair with a mild dignity with which Wat was unacquainted.

"Penton would not be yours," she said, "if Sir Walter were dead now. Would you like to step into what is your father's, Wat? Would you like to say he is only to live five years or ten years because the inheritance is yours? Your father will probably live as long as Sir Walter. I hope so, I am sure. He is fifty now, and that would be thirty-five years hence. Would Penton be yours, or would you be impatient for your father to die?"

"Mother!" they all cried in one indignant outcry, the

three together.

"It looks as if you meant that. You don't, I know—but it looks like it. Sir Walter may just as well live ten years longer, and your father thirty years after that, so that you would be sixty before you succeeded to Penton. Is it so much worth waiting for? Is it worth while showing yourself envious, dissatisfied with what your father is doing,

unkind to your relations, because, forty or fifty years hence, perhaps—"

Walter got up from his chair, as a man is apt to do when the argument becomes intolerable. "Mother," he said, "you know very well that not one of those intentions was in my mind. I don't want to become bosom friends with people who are injuring us for their own advantage; but as to wishing my father a single hour, a single moment less-or even Sir Walter-" the youth cried, with a break in his voice.

"Oh," cried Anne, with impatience, "as if mother did not know that! Mother, the others are dreadfully unrea-

sonable. I'll go."

Mrs. Penton paused a little and cleared her throat. "I am afraid you are just the one that is not asked. I dare say your cousin thinks that you are not out, Anne: and no more you are, my dear."

"She is as much out as I am, and we have always said when we went anywhere we should go together. Mother,

if you wish it, of course I'll go."

"And equally of course I will go too," said Walter, somewhat indignant to be left out, "when my mother puts it like that."

"Well, children dear," said Mrs. Penton, sinking at once into an easier tone, "how could I put it otherwise? As long as you will go pleasantly and friendly, and make no reflections. It is such a natural thing, so right, so exactly what should be, both for them to ask and for you to accept. Well now,' she added, briskly, coming down from her high chair, drawing forward her own natural seat, putting out an accustomed hand for her work-basket-" now that this is all settled there are the preparations to think of. Walter, you must go up at once to your father's tailor—to his grand tailor, you know, whom he only goes to now and then—and order yourself some new suits."
"Some new suits!" they all cried, with widely opened

eyes.

"Yes," said Mrs. Penton, who never had been known to enter into any such schemes of extravagance before. deed, we may all go to town together, for I must look after Ally's things, and there is no time to be lost."

"My-things, mother!" The plural in both cases was

what petrified the young people, who had been used to get

only what could not be done without.

"You must have a nice tweed suit for the morning, Wat, and some dress clothes, and your father will tell you whether you should get any other things for Oxford, for of course I am not an authority as to what young men require. And it is so long since I have seen anything that is fashionable," said Mrs. Penton, "that I don't really know even what girls wear. Girls are really more troublesome than boys, so far as dress is concerned. You can trust a good tailor, but as to what is exactly suitable to a girl's complexion and style, and the details, you know—the shoes, and the gloves, and the fans, and all that—"

shoes, and the gloves, and the fans, and all that—'
"Mother!" cried Ally. The girl was awe-stricken;
pleasure had scarcely had time to spring up in her. She
was overwhelmed with the glories which she had never

realized before.

"Yes, my dear; there are a great many things involved in a girl's toilet which you would never think of; the dress is not all, nor nearly all. I have been so long out of the world, I have not even seen what people are wearing; but it will be easy to get a few hints. And what if we make a day of it, and go to town all together? Anne shall come too, though Anne is not going to Penton. I don't often allow myself a holiday," said Mrs. Penton, with her hands full of pinafores, "but I think I must just do so for once in a way."

The idea of this wonderful outing, which was much more comprehensible, besides being far more agreeable, than the visit to Penton, filled them all with pleasure. "For we know that will be fun!" said Anne. "Penton, I wish you joy of it, you two! You will have to be on your best behavior, and never do one thing you wish to do. I shall have the best of it—the day in town, and the shopping, which must be amusing, and to see everything; and then when you are setting out for Penton, and feeling very uncomfortable, I shall stay at home, and be the eldest, and be very much looked up to. Mother, when shall we go?"

"And oh, mother! how, how-"

"Is it to be paid for, do you want to know, Ally? My dear, we are going to have four times as much income as we ever had before. Think of that! And can you wonder I am glad? for I shall be able to do things for all of you

what you couldn't do without—enough to keep you decent—I can now give you what is right for you and best for you. Oh, my dears, you can't tell what a difference it makes! What is a place like Penton (which I never cared for at all) in comparison to being able to get whatever you want for your children? There is no comparison. It has not come yet, it is true, for the papers are not ready, but still it is quite certain. And I can venture to take you to town for a day, and we can all venture to enjoy ourselves a little. And I'm sure I am very much obliged to Mrs. Rus-

sell Penton for taking such a thing into her head."

To this even the grumblers had nothing to say; even Wat himself, who perhaps was less impressed by the idea of two new suits from the tailor's than his sisters were about their new frocks. A new suit of evening clothes can scarcely be so exciting to a boy as the thought of a balldress with all its ribbons and flowers and decorations, and those delightful adjuncts of shoes and gloves and fan all in harmony, is to a girl. Ally's imagination was so startled by it that she could scarcely realize the thought in any practical way, and her enjoyment was nothing to Anne's, who mapped it all out in her mind, and already began to suggest to her sister what she should have, with a perception which must have been instinct: since Anne had not even that knowledge of an evening party which any one of the maids who had assisted at such ceremonials might possess, though in a humble way. Martha, for instance, in her last place had helped to dress the young ladies when they were going out, and had got a glimpse of Paradise in the cloak-room when her former mistress had a ball. But alas! such possibilities had never come to Ally and Anne. They knew nothing about the fineries in which girls indulged. Anne, however, by intuition, whatever the philosophers may say, knew, never having learned. Perhaps she had got a little information to guide her out of novels, of which, in a gentle way, Mrs. Penton herself was fond, and which had opened vistas of society to the two girls.

"You must have a white, of course," she said to her sister, "blues and pinks, and that sort of thing, may go out of fashion, but white never. Mother thinks you must

have two."

[&]quot;We are only asked for three days," cried Ally, "and

that only means two evenings. Why should I have more

than one dress for only two evenings?"

"Why, just for that reason, you silly!" cried Anne. "Do you think mother would like to send you to Penton with just what was necessary, to make them think you had only one frock? Oh, no! If you were staying for a fortnight of course you would not want something different every night; but for two days—"

"I should much rather you had the second one, Anne."

"I dare say! as if there was any question about me. I shall have what I require when my time comes. Don't you know we are going to be well off now?"

"Oh, Anne! it is rather poor to think of being well off

only as a way of getting new frocks."

"It is a great deal more than that, of course, but still it is that too. It is nice to have new frocks when one wants them, instead of waiting and waiting till one can have the cheapest possible thing that will do. We have always had things that would do. Now we are to have what we require—what we like. I wish Wat and you, Ally, would see it as mother and I do. Perhaps it may be nice to be the chief people of one's name, and be able to snub all the rest, even Cousin Alicia, but—"

"I never wished to snub any one, much less Cousin

Alicia," cried Ally, with indignation.

"That is really what it comes to. We wanted to be the grandest of the family, to be able to say to Mrs. Russell Penton, 'Stand aside, you're only a woman, and let Sir Edward walk in.' And why should she be disinherited because she's a woman? I am going in for women, for the woman's side. I don't believe father is as clever as she is. Oh, to be sure I like father a great deal better. How could you ask such a question? But he rather looks up to her; he is not so clever; he couldn't set one down as she does, only by a look out of her eyes. No, no, no; a new frock when one wants it, and to go to town for the day, and even to the theater, or to have a dance at home—all that is far, far better than snubbing Cousin Alicia. But,' added Anne, with sudden gravity, "for you that have got to go and stay there, it is rather dreadful after all."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PRIMROSE PATH.

WALTER PENTON had been the most satisfactory of sons and brothers. He had not rebelled much even against the discipline of reading aloud. He was only twenty, and there was nothing to do in the neighborhood of the Hook, especially in the evening, so that circumstances had helped to make him good. He had, to tell the truth, taken a great interest in the novels, so much as to be tempted often to carry off the current volume and see "how it ended" by himself, which the girls thought very mean of him. But very rarely, except in summer, or when there was some special attraction out-of-doors, had he declined to aid the progress of the pinafores, in his way, by reading. But lately he had not been so good. Perhaps it was because there was a moon, and the evenings had been particularly bright; but he had not asked the girls to share his walks, as formerly it had been so natural to do. Sometimes he did not come into the drawing-room at all after tea, but would intimate that he had "work" to do, especially now, when, if he were really going to Oxford, it was necessary for him to rub up his Greek a little. Nobody could say that this was not perfectly legitimate and in fact laudable; and though the ladies were disappointed they could make no complaint, especially as in the general quickening of the family life there was, for the moment, many things to talk of, which made reading aloud less necessary. For instance, on the evening of the day which they had spent in town there was no occasion for reading. The most exciting romance could not have been more delightful than the retrospect of that delightful day. They all went up together by the early train. Mr. Penton himself had said that he thought he might as well go too, and accompany Walter to the tailor's, as that was a place in which ladies were inadmissable; and accordingly they parted at the railway, the mother and the girls going one way, and the father and his boy another-both parties with a sense of the unusual about them which made their expedition exhilarating. To spend money when you feel (and that for the first

time) that you can afford it is of itself exhilarating, especially (perhaps) to women who have little practice in this amusement, and to whom the sight of the pretty things in the shops is a pleasure of a novel kind. It was a matter of very serious business indeed to the ladies, carrying with it a profound sense of responsibility. Two evening dresses, for a girl who had never had anything better than the simplest muslin! and a "costume" for morning wear of the most complete kind, with everything in keeping, jacket and hat and gloves. The acquisition of this could scarcely be called pleasure. It was too solemn and important, a thing the accomplishment of which carried with it a certain sensation of awe; for what if it should not be quite in the fashion? what if it should be too much in the fashion? too new, too old, not having received the final approval of those authorities which rule the world? Sometimes a thing may be very pretty, and yet not secure that verdict; or it may be mal porté, as the French say, worn first by some one whose adoption of it is an injury. All these things have to be considered: and when the purchasers are country people, ignorant people who do not know what is going to be worn! So that the responsibility of the business fully equaled its pleasantness, and it was only when the more important decisions were made, and the attention of the buyers, at too high a tension in respect to other articles, came down to the lighter and easier consideration of ribbons and gloves, that the good of the expedition began to be fully enjoyed. And then they all had luncheon together, meeting when their respective business was executed. Mr. Penton took them to a place which was rather a dear place, which he had known in his youth, when all the places he had known were dear places. It was perhaps, a little old-fashioned too, but this they were not at all aware of. And the lunch he had ordered was expensive, as Mrs. Penton had divined. She said as much to the girls as they drove from their shop to the rendezvous. She said, "I know your father will order the very dearest things." And so he had; but they enjoyed it all the more. The extravagance itself was a pleasure. It was such a thing as had never happened in all their previous experience; a day in town, a day shopping, and then a grand luncheon and a bottle of champagne. "If we are going to be so much better off they may as well get the good of it," Mr. Penton replied, in answer to his wife's half-hearted remonstrance. For she too found a pleasure in the extravagance. Her protest was quite formal; she too was quite disposed for it once in a way—just to let them know, in the beginning of their

mended fortune, what a little pleasure was.

And when they came home, bringing sugar-plums and a few toys for the little ones, they were all a little tired with this unusual, this extraordinary dissipation. After tea the pinafores did not make much progress; they were too much excited to care to go on with their reading. They wanted to talk over everything and enjoy it a second time more at their leisure. They had shaken off the sense of responsibility, and only felt the pleasure of the holiday, which was so rare in their life. Mr. Penton himself was seduced into making comparison of the London of which they had thus had a flying glimpse with the London he had known in the old days, and into telling stories of which somehow the point got lost in the telling, but which had been, as he said, "very amusing at the time;" while the girls listened and laughed, not at his stories so much as out of their own consciousness that it had all been "fun," even the inconveniences of the day, and the prosiness of those inevitable tales. Mrs. Penton was the one who subsided most easily out of the excitement. But for a little look of complacence, an evident sense that it was she who had procured them all this pleasure, there was less trace in her than in any of the others of the day's outing. She drew her work-basket to her as usual after tea. She was not to be beguiled out of her evening's work; but she smiled as she went on with her darning, and listened to the father's stories, and the saucy commentaries of the girls, with a happy abandonment of all authority in consideration of the unusual character of the day. The only thing that brought a momentary shadow over the party was that Walter was not there.

"There is no moon to-night, but Wat is off again for one of his walks. I wonder what has made him so fond of walks, just when we want him at home?" the girls cried. And then a little mist came over his mother's eyes. She said, "Hush! he is probably at his Greek;" but whether

she believed this or not nobody could say.

Walter, it need scarcely be said, was not at his Greek. He went up the road toward the village with long strides devouring the way, though there was no moon nor any visi-

ble inducement. The village was as quiet a spot as could be found in all England. The only lights it showed were in a few cottage windows, or glimmering from behind the great holly-bushes at the rectory; a little bit of a straggling street, with an elbow composed of a dozen little houses, low and irregular, which streamed away toward the dark and silent fields, with the church, the natural center, rising half seen, a dark little tower pointing upward to the clouds. There was scarcely any one about, or any movement save at the public-house, where what was quite an illumination in the absence of other lights—the red glow of the fire, and the reflection of a lamp through a red curtain-streamed out into the road, making one warm and animated spot in the gloom. Wat, however, did not go near that center of rustic entertainment. He stopped at a low wall which surrounded a cottage on the outskirts—a cottage which had once been white, and had still a little grayness and luminousness of aspect which detached it from the surrounding darkness. A few bristling dry branches of what was in summer a bit of hedge surrounded the low projection of the wall. Walter paused there, where there was nothing visible to pause for. The night was dark. A confused blank of space, where in daylight the great stretch of the valley lay, was before him, sending from afar a fresh breath of wind into his face, while behind him, in the nearer distance, shone the few cottage lights, culminating in the red glow from the Penton Arms. What did he want at this corner with his back against the wall? Nothing, so far as any one could see. He made no signal, gave forth no sound, save that occasionally his feet made a stir on the beaten path as he changed his position. They got tired, but Walter himself was not tired. Presently came the faint sound of a door opening, and a flitting of other feet -light, short steps that scarcely seemed to touch the ground—and then the gate of the little garden clicked, and, heard, not visible, something came out into the road. "Oh, are you here again, Mr. Walter? Why have you

come again? You know I don't want you here."

"Why shouldn't you want me? I want to come; it's

my pleasure."

The voice of the young man had a deeper tone, a manlier bass than its usual youthful lightness coming through the dark, and the great space and freedom of the night.

"It's a strange pleasure," said the other voice. "I should not think it any pleasure were I in your place. If even there was a moon! for people that are fond of the beauties of nature that is always something. But now it is so dark "-there seemed a sort of shiver in the voice. "The dark is a thing I can't abide, as they say here."

"For my part, I like it best. Come this way, where the view is, and you would think you could see it-that is, you can feel it, which is almost more. Don't you know what I mean? The wind blows from far away; it comes from miles of space, right out of the sky. You could feel even

that the landscape was below you from the feel of the air."
"That is all very pretty," she said, and this time there was the indication of a yawn in her tone, "but if it is only for the sake of the landscape, one can see that when it's day, and feeling it is a superfluity in the dark. If that was all you came for-'

"I did not come for that at all, as you know. I came for-it would be just the same to me if there was no land-

scape at all, if it was a street corner-"

"Under a lamp-post! Oh, that is my ideal!" with a little clap of her hands. "What I would give to see a lamp again, a bright, clear, big light, like Oxford Street or the

Circus! You think that is very vulgar, I know."

"Nothing is vulgar if you like it. I should like lampposts too if they had associations. I saw plenty of them to-day, and I wished I could have had you there to take you for a walk past the shop windows, since you are so fond of them."

"Oh, the shop windows! Don't talk to a poor exile of her native country that she is pining for! So you were in

town; and what did you see there?"

"Nothing," said Wat.

"Nothing!-in London! You must be the very dullest, or the most obstinate, or prejudiced- Nothing! why,

everything is there!"

"You were not there; that makes all the difference. I kept thinking all the time where I should have found you had you been in London. You never will tell me where you live, or how can I see you when you go back."

"I am not going back yet, worse luck," she said.

"But that is no answer. I kept looking out to-day to see if I could find any place which looked as if you might have lived there. The only place I saw like you was in Park Lane, and that, I suppose—''

"Park Lane!" she cried, with a suppressed laugh; "that was like old Crockford's niece. I could receive all my relations then."

"You are not old Crockford's niece?"

"No, I told you—I am a heroine in trouble," she said. Her laugh was perhaps a little forced, but if Walter observed that at all it only increased the interest and fascination of such a paradox as might have startled a wiser man. "And is town very empty?" she said. "But the streets will be gay and the shop windows bright because of Christmas—there is always a little movement before Christmas, and things going on. And to think that I shall see nothing—not so much as a pantomime—buried down here!"

"I thought most people came to the country for Christ-

mas," said Wat.

"Oh, the sw-; why shouldn't I say it right out?—the swells you mean; but we are not swells in my place. We

enjoy ourselves with all our hearts."

"I am sorry you think it so dull in the country," said poor Wat. "I wish you liked it better. If you had been brought up here, like me-but of course that is impossible. Perhaps when you get better used to it-"

"I shall never be used to it; I am on the outlook, don't

you know? for some one to take me back."

"Don't say that," said Walter, "it hurts me so. I should like to reconcile you to this place, to make you fond of it, so that you should prefer to stay here."

"With whom? with old Crockford?" she said.

Walter was very young, and trembled with the great flood of feeling that came over him. "Oh, if I had only a palace, a castle, anything that was good enough for you! but I have nothing—nothing you would care for. That is what makes it odious beyond description, what makes it more than I can bear."

"What is more than you can bear?"

"Losing Penton," cried the young man; "I told you. If Penton were still to be mine I know what I should say. It is not a cottage like Crockford's, nor a poor muddy sort of place like the Hook. It is a house worthy even of such as you. But I am like the disinherited knight, I have nothing till I work for it."

"That is a great pity," she said; "I have seen Penton; it is a beautiful place. It seems silly, if you have a right

to it, to give it up."

"You think so too!" he cried; "I might have known you would have thought so; but I am only my father's son, and they don't consult me. If I had any one to stand by me I might have resisted—any one else, whose fortune was bound up in it as well as mine."

"Yes: what a pity in that case that you were not mar-

ried," she said.

"I might be still," cried Walter, with tremulous vehemence, "if you would have faith in me—if you would forget what I am, a nobody, and think what, with such a

hope, I might be."

"I!" there was a sound of mocking in the laughing voice; "what have I got to do with it? What would those great swells at Penton think if they knew you were saying

such things to old Crockford's niece."

"It is they who have nothing to do with it," he cried. "Do you think if you were to trust me that I should care what they— But oh, don't, don't call yourself so, you know it is not true; not that it matters if you were. You would to me, all the same, be always yourself, and that means everything that a woman can be."

There was a pause before she replied, and her voice was a little softened. "They will never know anything about me at Penton, or anywhere else. I have come here in the dark; you have scarcely seen me in daylight at all, for all

you are so silly."

"Yes, a hundred times," cried Walter. "Do you think you can go out that I don't see you? I live about

the roads since you have been here."

"It is a pity," she said, with a little sharpness, "that you have nothing better to do;" then, resuming her lighter tone, "If you don't soon begin to do something a little more practical how are you ever to be—that somebody that you were offering to me?"

"It is true," he said, "it is true; but don't blame me. I am going to Oxford next month, and then, if I do not

work-"

"To Oxford! But that's not work, that's only education," she cried, with a faint mixture of something like disappointment in her voice.

"Education is work; it opens up everything. It gives a man a name. I have been kept back; but, oh, now, if you will say I may look forward—if you will say I may hope."

"Look forward to what?" she said; "to come up here every evening, and invite me out to talk in the cold at the corner of old Crockford's wall? I do not mind, for I've nothing else to amuse me now: and you have nothing else to amuse you, so far as I can see; but, presently I shall disappear like a will-o'-the-wisp, and what will you look forward to then?"

"That is what I say," he said. "I feel it every day. You will go away, and what am I to do, where am I to find you? Every morning when I wake it is the first thing I think of-perhaps she may be gone, and not a trace, not

an indication, left behind, not even a name."

"Oh, it is not so bad as that. You know my name, but I tell you always it is a great deal better you should know no more, for what is the use? You are going to Oxford, where you will be for years and years before you can do anything. And at present you are the disinherited knight and I am a will-o'-the-wisp. Very well. We play about a little and amuse each other, and then you will ride off and I shall dance away."

"No, no, no; for the sake of pity, if not for love-"

"What has a will-o'-the-wisp to do with these sort of things, or a young man at college? At college! it is only a school-boy a little bigger. Ride off, ride off, Sir Disinherited Knight; and as for me, it's my part to go dancing, dancing away."

And she was gone, disappearing with no sound but the little click of the gate, the pat of those footsteps which scarcely touched the ground, snatching from him the hand which he had tried to take, the hand which he had never vet been allowed to hold for a moment. He stood for a time at the corner of the wall, tantalized, tremulous, trying to persuade himself that she was not really gone, that she would appear again, a shadow out of the darkness. This was all he had seen of her except in distant glimpses, although their intercourse had gone so far. He was ready to pledge his life to her, and yet this was all he knew. Walter thought to himself as he went slowly down the hill, all thrilling with this interview, that never had there been such a courtship before. He was proud of it, poor boy.

There was something rapturous in its strangeness, in the fact that he did not even know her name, nothing but Emmy, which he had heard Martha call her. Emmy did not mean much, yet it was all he knew. He called her in his heart by names out of the poets-Una, Rosalind, Elaine. She was as much a creature of romance as any of them. He dreamed in those sweet dreams awake which are the privilege of youth, of seeing her flash out upon him from unimaginable surroundings, a princess, a peerless lady, something noble and great, something not to be put on the level of ordinary women. What she was doing in this cottage he scarcely asked himself—she who belonged to so different a sphere. But it was sweet to him to think that his love was so original, unlike that of any one else. His head was full of an intoxication of pleasure, of pride and wonder. Nobody had ever had such a story. Ah, if he had but Penton to take her home to! But anyhow he could conquer fortune for the sake of this sweet unknown.

This was how Walter spent his evenings while the others sat round the household lamp. He had the best of it. While Ally was thinking only of the visit to Penton, or at least of nothing else that she allowed even to herself, Wat, only two years older, felt himself standing on the threshold of an illimitable future, full of everything that was wonderful and sweet.

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CHAPTER XVII. ILL STATE Dell'en

GOING INTO THE WORLD.

It was very near Christmas when Walter and Ally went to Penton on the visit which had caused so much excitement. It had been arranged that on Christmas-eve they should return, for to spend that day away from their family was impossible, a thing not to be done had the invitation come from royalty itself. They went with all their new things so nicely packed, and their hearts beating, and many warnings and recommendations from the most careful of mothers.

"Wat, be careful that you never, never let them see, if it was only by a look, that you do not agree with what your father is doing. You must not let him down among his relations. You must let them see that what he doesOh, Wat, you must be very particular to show a proper pride. Don't look as if you had any grudge; don't let them suppose-"

"I hope I am not quite a fool," said the indignant youth.

"A fool! I never thought you were a fool; but you are young, my dear boy, and you feel strongly. And, Ally! mind you don't show that you are unaccustomed to the sort of service and waiting upon that is natural there. If your cousin offers to send her maid to help you, don't you come out with, 'Oh, no; I do everything for myself at home.' I don't want you to say anything that is not true. But, as a matter of fact, you don't do everything for yourself at home. What does it matter to Mrs. Russell Penton whether you have a maid or whether it is Anne and I that help you? You always are helped, you know. Say, 'Oh, I think I can manage quite well, 'or something of that sort."

"But, mother, Cousin Alicia must know how we live,

and that I have no maid at home."

"Oh, they never think, these great ladies; they take it for granted that everybody has everything just as they have. Most probably she would think it was my fault if she heard that you had no maid. And, Ally! don't be so shy as you usually are; don't keep behind backs; remember that the only thing you can do for people who wish you to stay with them is to be as friendly as possible, and to talk, and help to amuse them."

"I-to amuse Cousin Alicia, mother!"

"Well, dear, as much as you can. Amuse perhaps is not the word: but you must not sit as if you were cut out of wood or stone. And, Wat! if there is shooting or anything going on, just do what the other gentlemen do. have always heard that Mr. Russell Penton was very nice; you will be quite right if you keep your eye upon him."
"One would think we were going to court, where there

are all kinds of etiquettes, to hear you speak, mother."

"Well, my dears, there are all sorts of etiquettes everywhere; and in one way it is easier at court, for if you don't understand there is nothing wonderful in that, and every one is willing to tell you: whereas in a grand house you are supposed to know everything by nature. I don't doubt at all that things will go on quite comfortably and all right. But, Ally, dear-",

"Mother, don't bother her any more," cried Anne.

"She will be so frightened she will never venture to open her lips at all, for fear she should say something wrong. I wish it was only me."

"Oh, so do I," cried Ally, from the bottom of her heart.
"And I," said Wat; "any one may have my share."

"That is just how things are—always contrairy, as Martha says. I should have rather enjoyed it. I should have liked to see everything. Cousin Alicia might have put on her icy face as much as she liked, she would not have frozen me. But we can't change places now at the last moment, and the fly will have to be paid for if it waits. Come, Ally, come! for sooner or later you know you must go."

Anne and her mother stood and watched the reluctant pair as they drove away with a mingled sense of envy and relief. The fly from the village was not a triumphal chariot; the old gray horse had a dilapidated aspect; the

day was damp and rainy.

"We may be afloat before you come back," said Anne,

waving her hand.

And then they left the door and the house out of sight, and departed into the unknown. Into the unknown! If it had been to Russia it could not have been further away, nor could the habits and customs of a foreign country have been more alarming to the young adventurers. They were so much overawed that they said little to each other. Ally drew back into the corner of the carriage, Walter looked out of the opposite window. They were in a moment separated by half a world, though the same rug was tucked round both their knees. The boy looked out with an eagerness which he could scarcely conceal for something tangible, something of which his mind was full. The girl drew back into a vague delightful world of dreams in which there was nothing definite. Who was it that had said to her something about driving up unthinking to a door within which you might meet your fate. Who was it? she asked herself, and yet she remembered very well who it was; and as she drove along there rose before her a whole panorama of shifting, changing pictures. She was standing again by the muddy, turbid river, and hearing, as in a dream, the first words of wooing, the suggested devotion, the under-current of an inference which made her the chief interest, the center of the world: which is such a thing

as may well startle any girl into attention. And then the scenery changed, and the new world opened, and other, vaguer figures, yet more wonderful, appeared about her, some of them with that same look in their eyes. How did Ally know what might be waiting for her in that home of romance, that wonderful house of Penton, with which all the visions of her life had been connected? Sometimes when one is not thinking one drives up to a door and finds inside one's fate. What does that mean-one's fate? Young Rochford had-given her to understand that he had found his when he arrived at Penton Hook, and the words had vaguely seized upon Ally's imagination, filling her with a curious thrill of sensation. His fate! She did not think of this with compunction or regret, as one who more thoroughly recognized what was meant might have done. It moved her rather to an excited, half-awed sense of power in herself which she did not understand before, than to any sympathy for him. She thought in the keen consciousness of awakening, of herself, and not of him. It was wrong; it was a guilty sort of selfishness: but she could not help it. His words, which had first opened her eyes—his looks, which perhaps a little earlier had lighted a spark of perception, had been like the sounding of the réveillé—like the rising of a morning star. She was not to blame for it; she had done nothing which could connect her with his fate, as he called it. It was a summons to her to behold and recognize her own position, the wonderful, mysterious position, which a woman-a girl-seemed to be born to, which she had been thrust into without any doing of hers.

When the fancy is first touched, the thoughts that follow are sweet—sweeter perhaps than anything that can succeed—in their perfectly indefinite exhilaration and vague sense of a personal beatitude that scarcely anything else can bring. This does not always mean love, which is a different effect. Ally knew nothing about love; she only felt in all her being the new and wonderful power of awakening emotion in others, of which nobody had ever told her, and which she had never dreamed of as appertaining to herself. She had read of it as being possessed by others—by the beautiful maidens of romance, by ladies moving in those dazzling spheres of society which were altogether beyond the reach and even the desires of a little country girl. But Ally knew very well that she was not a great beauty, nor so

clever and gifted as those heroines were who in novels and romances brought all the world to their feet. She entertained no delusions on this subject. She was not beautiful at all, nor cleve at all. She was only Ally: and yet she had it in her power to bring that look into another's eyes. It was more strange, more thrilling, sweet, confusing than

words could say.

As for Walter, his imaginations were far more definite. They were very definite indeed, distant as every anticipation was. He looked out to see one figure, one face, which he could not look out upon calmly, with a spectator by his side, which he longed yet feared to behold in the daylight, in the midst of a world awake and observant, with Ally looking on. He expected nothing but to be questioned on the subject—to be asked what he was looking for, why he leaned out of the window, what there was to see. When it dawned upon him that Ally meant to ask no questions, that she had the air of taking no notice, he became suspicious and uneasy, thinking that she must mean something by her silence, that there was more in it than met the eye. By nature she would have asked him a hundred questions. She would have looked, too, wondering what he could possibly expect to see on the road or in the village that could be interesting. Walter said to himself that some report must have reached home of those expeditions of his to Crockford's cottage, and that Ally must have been told to watch, not to excite his suspicions by questioning, to be on the alert for whatever might happen. He turned his back to her and blocked up the window with his head and shoulders as they drove past Crockford's. And there, indeed, was the face he longed to see looking out from the cottage window, staring at him maliciously, with a smile which was not a smile of recognition, defying him, as it seemed, to own the acquaintance. A great panic was in Walter's heart. To betray this secret, to make it visible to the eyes of the world—i. e., to the old rector, who, as illluck would have it, was strolling past at the moment, taking his afternoon walk, and of Ally watching him from her corner-was terrible to the young man. And to expose himself to be questioned—to be asked who she was (which he did not know), and where he had met her, and a hundred other details; perhaps to be solemnly warned that he must see her no more! All these reflections flashed through

Walter's spirit. She was evidently in the mind to take no notice of him, to own no acquaintance; and there were so many temptations on his side to do the same, to make his eyes do all his salutations, to avoid giving any satisfaction to the spies about. But his instincts as a gentleman were too much for Walter. He leaned a little further out of the window and took off his hat. How could he pass the place where she was, and look at her and make no sign? It was impossible! Walter took off his hat with a heroism scarcely to be surpassed on the perilous breach. It might be ruin; it might mean discovery, betrayal; he might be sent away, banished from his gates of paradise; but, whatever

happened, he could not be disrespectful to her.

She did not return the salutation, but she opened the window and looked out after the carriage, putting out into the damp air what Walter within himself called her beautiful head. It was not, strictly speaking, a beautiful head, but it had various elements of beauty-dark eyes full of light; a crop of soft brown silky hair, clustering in curly short luxuriance; a complexion pale and clear, but lightly touched with color; and a mouth which was really a wonder of a mouth beside the ordinary developments of that universally defective feature. She looked after him with mockery in her eyes, which only attracted the foolish boy the more, and made him half frantic to spring from his place in the sight of the village and put himself at her feet. It would have cost her nothing to give him a smile, a wave of her hand; and there was no telling what it might cost him to have taken off his hat to her; but she was immovable. He gazed, as long as he could see anything, out of the carriage window. At least, if he had sacrificed himself he should get the good of it, and look, and look, as long as eyes could

"How d'ye do?—how d'ye do?" cried the rector, waving his hand toward the carriage. Perhaps he thought that the salutation was for him, the old bat. Walter drew in his head again, and looked with keen suspicion at his sister in her corner, who raised her eyes, which seemed heavy (could she have been asleep?), with a dreamy sort of smile, totally unlike the smile of a spy maturing her observations, and asked,

[&]quot;Who was that?"

[&]quot; Who was what?"

"The voice," said Ally, "in the street—'How d'ye

"It was the rector—who else should it be? Do you

mean to say you did not see him going along the road?"

"No, I did not see him," said Ally, with that dreamy, imbecile sort of smile. She had seen nothing, noticed nothing! And the rector had taken it for granted that the greeting had been for himself, and thought young Walter was very civil: and all had passed over with perfect safety, as if it had been the most natural thing in the world. Walter fell back into the other corner, and thus the brother and sister swung and jolted along, each in a beatitude and agitation of his (and her) own. Perhaps there was a subtle sort of sympathy in the silence. They did not say anything to each other until they had turned in at the gates, and were stumbling along the avenue at Penton under the pine-trees, all bare and moaning. This roused them instinctively, although their dreams were more absorbing than anything else in earth or heaven.

"Here we are at last," said Ally, rousing herself, but

speaking under her breath.

"Not yet; don't you know the avenue is nearly a mile long? And don't be frightened—remember what mother said."

"Oh, not frightened," she cried, but caught her breath a little. "Wat, I wish it was over, and we were going home."

"So do I, Ally; but we must go through with it now we are here."

"Oh, I suppose so. Will she be waiting at the door, do you think, or come to meet us? or will they tell us she is out, and offer to show us our rooms, and send us tea?"

"As they do in novels to the poor relations? I hope they will have better taste," said Walter, growing red, "than to try the poor relation dodge with us. Oh, no! Mrs. Russell Penton knows that she is still more or less in our power."

"I wish the first was over," said Ally; "it may not perhaps seem so dreadful after that."

And in this not ecstatic state of mind they drew up at the door, where the footman who came out looked with contempt at the shabby village fly. Mrs. Russell Penton had been walking, and was coming in at that moment,

with a little chubby-faced girl by her side. Cousin Alicia and her companion took in every feature of the shabby fly, the old horse, the driver with his patched coat, as they came forward. It was almost more dreadful than what Walter called "the poor relation dodge," though Mrs. Russell Penton was so civil as to come to the door of the fly, which was difficult to open, to receive her visitors. Already, before even they entered the house, their poverty had thus been put to shame. Neither of them, indeed, made much account of the little round-faced stranger who stood looking on, with her mouth a little open, watching their disembarkation. Nothing could look more insignificant than this little girl did. She might have been a little waiting-maid, an attendant, not smart enough for a soubrette; even Mrs. Russell Penton took no notice, did not introduce her, but left her standing as if she were of no importance, while she herself conducted Ally upstairs. Walter himself, in the confusion of the arrival, had nearly followed without thinking. But fortunately (which was a great satisfaction to him afterward) that habit of good-breeding which would not let him pass Crockford's cottage without taking off his hat, inspired him to stand back, and let the little maid, as he thought her, pass in before him. She did this with a little blush and shy bow, and ran through the hall out of sight, as a little person in what was presumably her position would do; and Walter followed his sister upstairs. He felt that there was nothing to complain of in the matter of their reception, at least. They were not being treated as poor relations. Whatever might happen afterward, there was a certain soothing in that. Penton had grown been red, and said some bad notice

CHAPTER XVIII.

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PREPARATION FOR THE GUESTS.

THE arrival of the visitors had not been unattended with excitement at Penton itself. Little Mah Russell, the great heiress, had reached the house only a few days before, and as her uncle's stately wife was an object of some alarm to her, the prospect of a companion of her own age was doubly agreeable. Mab was the daughter of a brother of Mr. Russell Penton's, who had never been of much account in the family, who had gone abroad and made a great fortune,

and died, leaving this one little girl rich enough to cause a flutter in whatever society she came into, as good as an estate, much better than most appointments for any young man in want of an establishment. Russell Penton had taken from the first a whimsical sort of interest in her, which did not show itself in the way in which interest is usually exhibited by elderly relations. To shield her from fortune-hunters, to find some equal match in which the advantage should not be altogether on the gentleman's side, did not seem to be a thing which entered into his thoughts. He spoke of her with a faint laugh full of humor and a realization of all the circumstances such as few men would have made apparent. With the charitable and amused eyes of a man who had himself, being poor, married an heiress, he looked at all the flutterers who had already appeared in Mabel's youthful train. He was tolerant of the young men. He laughed half abashed, half sympathetic, at their little wiles, asking himself had he made his intentions so transparent as that? and putting forth his little measures of defense without any of the hard words that generally accompany such precautions. When other people warned the little girl against the dangers to which she was subjectand she had already receive many warnings to this effect, even from Mrs. Russell Penton herself, who was one of the most anxious of her advisers-Mabel had been greatly comforted to find that her uncle Gerald only laughed. The little girl did not quite understand the combination; for when Gerald laughed, his wife grew more grave than ever and anxious to protect the heiress. "Why does Uncle Gerald laugh?" she had asked one day. And Mrs. Russell Penton had grown very red, and said something about his inclination to see a joke in the gravest subjects, which Mabel, who was very fond of her uncle, thought severe. And their several accounts of the expected visitors perplexed her more and more.

"I hope, my dear," Mrs. Russell Penton said, "that you will find my godchild pleasant. I can give you very little information about her, I am ashamed to say. We have been so much out of England—and though they are relations, they are rather out of our sphere."

"Poor," said her husband, "but not the less agreeable for that."

[&]quot;I would not go so far," said Alicia, in her grave way.

"To be poor is of course nothing against them, but unfortunately poverty does affect the training, and manners, and ways of thinking. I should have preferred not to have them when you were here, but circumstances, which I could not resist.

"It is kind of you, Alicia, not to say over which you had no control: for the circumstances, I fear, were your unworthy uncle, Mab. I wanted them; and my wife, who is very good always, and ready to please me, gave in, which

is generally more than I deserve."

"Why did you want them, Uncle Gerald?" Mab in-

quired.

"There is a big question!" he answered, laughing; "am I to lay bare all my motives to this little thing, and let her

see the depths of my thoughts?"

"And why did Aunt Gerald not want them?" pursued Mab. She had no genius or even much intelligence to speak of; but the fact of being an heiress has a very maturing influence, and little Mab was aware of a thing or two which has not been formulated in any philosopher. She inspected the two people who were so much older and wiser

than she with very shrewd and wide-open eyes.

"My motives are clear enough," said Mrs. Russell Penton, with a look at her husband which would have been angry if she had not had so much respect for him, and warning if she had not known how impracticable he was. "I felt it my duty to your family, my dear, that you should make no unsuitable acquaintances, nor run the risk perhaps of contracting likings, I mean friendships—I mean becoming perhaps attached to people who would not prove to be the kind of people you ought to know, in my—in our house."

This very complicated sentence, so unlike the lucidity of Mrs. Russell Penton's usual conversation, was entirely due to the fact that her husband's eyes, with a laugh in them, were upon her all the time she was speaking. Mab's astonished exclamation, "But your relations, Aunt Gerald-I

have always heard that your family-"

"I can scarcely say that these young people belong to my family. They are the children of a distant cousin. Their mother I scarcely know. They have not been brought up as-you have been, for instance. They will not know any of the people you know. In short-but, of course, as

they will only be here for three days, it can not make much

difference. What is it, Bowker? My father?-''

Mrs. Russell Penton got up very reluctantly to answer Sir Walter's summons. She gave her husband an almost imploring look. She wanted to do more than put the heiress on her guard against these young people. She wanted Mab, in fact, to be set against them. The idea of any untoward complication happening, of the Russell family having it in their power to reproach her with inveigling their heiress into a connection with one of her own name, was intolerable to Alicia, all the more from the circumstances of her own marriage, which moved her husband so entirely the other way.

"One would think," said little Mab, with her shrewd look, "that Aunt Gerald did not like her relations; but

you, uncle, I think you do." Mando sand life

"This is a problem which your little wits are scarcely able to solve unassisted," he said, "though you make very good guesses, Mab. My wife is not fond of her relations -because they are her relations in the first place."

"Uncle Gerald!" of the staw only eldos on

"Such a statement is very crude and wants a great deal of clearing up. You never heard your aunt's story, did you, Mab?"

"Story?" said Mab, faltering. "I—I did not know that there was any story—except—"
Russell Penton began to speak. "Oh, yes, it was this." And then he was infected by Mab's embarrassment. He stopped, laughed, but awkwardly, even grew red, which, for a man of his years and experience, was inconceivable, and said, "No, no; not in that way. The story is not perhaps what you would call a story. It concerns not anything in the shape of a lover, so far as I know—"

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Uncle Gerald!"

"There is no harm done. She was not born to inherit all her father could leave to her, like you. There were brothers at first; and the heir of entail who succeeds now, who takes what should have been theirs, is the father of these two young ones. Don't you see? There is nothing for a good strong family repugnance like a cousin who is the heir of entail."

Mabel paused a little, employing her faculties upon this

question, which was new to her. Finally she delivered her judgment.

"Perhaps—at least I think I can understand. But the children haven't done anything, have they? It is not their

fault?"

"It is nobody's fault, as is the case with so many of the worst complications of life. And this is something a little worse still than the heir of entail. It is the heir whom you are buying out, whom you are persuading to part with his rights. Well, perhaps they are a bad kind of rights. I prefer not to give an opinion. To bind up a property for generations so that it shall descend only in a certain way may be wrong; neither you nor I are capable of clearing up such high questions, Mab. It is good for the family, but bad for the individual, as 'Nature, red in tooth and claw,' is, according to the laureate. But Mab, my little Mab, this boy Walter is the one that is to be done out of it. Don't you see? It is quite fair between Alicia and his father, but the boy has no voice, and he is done out of it. I think it is rather hard upon the boy."

"There was nothing said about a boy," said little Mab,

demurely. "I only heard of a girl."

"That was because you are not supposed to take any interest in boys," said her uncle, with a laugh; "not such a boy either in your eyes—over twenty, poor fellow, and no doubt having thought of the time when he should be the heir. He will be Sir Walter Penton in his turn, if he lives, but otherwise he is out of it. I, who never was in it, who am only a spectator, so to speak, I feel very much for

young Wat."

"Poor boy!" said Mab, under her breath. By effect of nature she took, as was to be expected, her uncle's view. Perhaps he ought not to have thus sacrificed his wife and her cause. But he had a motive, this man devoid of all sense of propriety—a bad, dreadful, motive such as any correcter judgment would have condemned. He wanted to interest the heiress in a penniless, prospectless young man. Could anything be more wicked and dreadful? He wanted to surround young Walter Penton with a halo of romance in Mabel's eyes, to call forth in his favor that charm of the unfortunate, that natural desire of the very young to compensate a sufferer, the very sentiments which he ought to have exorcised had they come by themselves

into being. His eyes lighted up when this breath of pity came from Mab's lips. A humorous sense of the balance in favor of the race of Penton which he thus meant to create, diminishing so far his own obligations, tickled his imagination. He would have liked to have some one to laugh with over this good joke. Perhaps even underneath the enjoyment there was something which was not so enjoyable, a sense of the worthlessness of wealth, and that poverty was by no means such a drawback as people thought. that was altogether private, unopened in his own soul; and he had not even any one who could appreciate the joke which was on the surface, and the pleasure he felt in raising rebellions in little Mab's mind, in prepossessing her in Wat's favor, in thwarting Alicia. He would not have thwarted her in anything else; he had the greatest respect for his wife, and it wanted only different circumstances, a change of position, to have made him the husband of husbands. But to thwart her on this point was delightful to him. He had set his heart upon it. It would be turning the tables also on his own people, which was agreeable too. "Yes," he said, more seriously. "Poor boy! all the more that he will not know how little, in reality, he loses

by the bargain that is being made over his head."

"What do you mean, Uncle Gerald? I thought you said you were so sorry for him-that he was losing so much."

"More in idea than in fact-much, everything in imagination, this house-which he calls, no doubt, the house of his fathers."

Mab looked round on the stately drawing-room which was full of a hundred beautiful things, a long room with a row of windows looking out over the wide landscape, divided and kept in proportion by pillars supporting a roof which, it had been the pride of a previous generation to tell, was painted by an Italian artist in the best taste of his century. "But isn't it the house of his fathers?" she said.

I suppose so, for as much as that is worth."

"Oh, Uncle Gerald! although we had always very nice houses, papa never thought there was anything equal to-"

"Yes, I know," he said, hurriedly, and paused a moment to remember. He went on by and by, with a voice slightly broken. "We were all brought up there from our childhood. Even that, Mab, is more in appearance than in reality. A man may get very little satisfaction even out

of the place where he was born."

Mab regarded him closely with her shrewd eyes. They were not beautiful eyes, they were rather small, but very blue, with a frosty keenness in them; and they saw a great deal. "You don't take a very bright view of things in general," she said.

Upon which he laughed and told her that he was an old grumbler, and not to be listened to. "Suppose I was to tell you that a ball every night (or half a dozen of them) would not make you perfectly happy, and that even your

first season might bore you-"

"Uncle Gerald, I have always heard that you were very fond of society. Did your first season bore you?" she asked.

"Not at all, not half enough, and—I am not sure that it would now, which is a confession to make at my age. Hush! not a word about that. I wish you to be kind to the young Pentons, remember, that is all. The little girl will be shy and the poor boy may be morose, I shouldn't wonder."

"But you have taken them under your protection," the girl said, looking at him fixedly. "What could they have

better than that? as if it mattered about me!"

Mr. Russell Penton shook his head, but he said nothing more. He went out of the room shortly after, when his wife came back. He was not a man to allow for a moment that there was anything in his position he did not like, or that his protection would not be effectual in his own, nay, in his wife's, or rather in his wife's father's house. But as he went out with his hands in his pockets, and the remains of a philosophical shrug keeping his shoulders rather nearer his ears than usual, he could not help being aware that it was so. It was a curious fact enough, and he would have been as well pleased that little Mab had not divined it; but still it was all in the day's work. He had known what the disadvantages would be when he accepted the position of Prince Consort, as he said to himself often. On the whole it was a position not without its alleviations, but (like most others in this world) it had to be taken with all its drawbacks, without any discussion, and still more without any complaint. There was no one who had not something to bear, some in one way, some in another, his own

perhaps not by a long way the worst. And then with a sort of grim amusement he began to wonder how, if his little plan should come to anything, young Wat would adapt himself to it. Young Wat, a foolish boy, mourning over his loss of this big house with all its French finery, its Renaissance front, its drawing-room roof by Sugero (this was his little joke upon the great Italian decorator's name), its water-works all out of order, what a thing it would be for him should he marry the Russell heiress with all her moneybags. And afterward how would he agree with it? Russell Penton was very loyal, but yet he felt that were he Wat, in all the freedom of opening life, with the whole world before him, he would neither bind a great shell like Penton upon his shoulders nor himself to a crown matrimonial. If the boy but knew what it was to be free! if he could realize the happiness of going where he would and doing what he pleased! To be sure he would probably have to work for that freedom, and he had not himself at any period of his career been a man who understood work. It was a thing he had no genius for. To take up the labors of a profession was more entirely out of the traditions and capabilities of his soul than the rôle which he had adopted. He was quite aware of this, and, knowing it, was very willing to promote Wat's interest in the same way which had, as people say, made his own fortune—judging Wat to have been in all likelihood spoiled for other kinds of advancement like himself. He had become even eager about this, determined that Wat should have his chance with the best, and that the Pentons should thus be even with the Russells, each family contributing a princess royal and each a fortunate consort; but in the midst of his benevolent scheme, of which his wife so entirely disapproved, he reserved to himself this subject of humorous curiosity—how Walter would take to the place, in which he was himself so loyal and patient, but yet never without a consciousness of all there was to bear and to do.

Mab, who was so shrewd, with all her wits about her, questioned Alicia closely when they were alone together. She knew already that the visitors were not much in the good books of the mistress of the house; but that she was a little ashamed of the feeling and anxious to have it understood that there was no reason for it. "I will not conceal from you," Mrs. Russell Penton repeated, "that I did not

wish you to meet them: not from anything wrong in them the girl is a nice gentle little thing, I have no doubt; and the boy-I know no harm of the boy; but I should have preferred that you had not met them here."

"Why, Aunt Gerald? do tell me why?"

But this was what Mrs. Penton could not or else would not do. She said, "Because they are not in our sphere. They are very nice, I don't doubt. They are, of course, just the same race as myself, so it is not for that; but you that have been brought up in the lap of luxury, and this girl, who probably has had the life of a nursery-maid (for the children are endless), how could you have anything to say to each other? There is too great a difference. This is what I always felt."

"And the boy," said Mab, in a little voice which was somewhat hypocritical, "is not he any better? Is he quite

a common boy?" Baw enell

"The boy is not worth considering," said Mrs. Russell Penton. "He is a hobbledehoy, neither boy nor man, don't you know? I don't suppose he has had more education than his sister, and I don't think he will amuse at all. But they are only coming for three days, and I hope you will not mind for that short time."

"Oh, I shall not mind," said Mab, "I like seeing people of all kinds." And thus the conversation dropped. But it need not be said that all this was the very best introduction possible of the two young Pentons to the notice of the little heiress. She did not indeed resolve to make to Wat an offer of her hand and fortune. But the thought of the heir who was an heir no longer, and of how the mere fact of being "out of it," while still so profoundly concerned, must work upon the mind, and all the traditional miseries of the poor gentleman took possession of her imagination. And fancy took the side of the unfortunate, as a young fancy always does. Accordingly, when the poor old brokendown fly drove up, and the portmanteaus were taken down, and the two timid young people stepped out of the moldy old carriage, Mab, though she saw the ludicrous features of the scene, felt not the least desire to laugh. She looked at them keenly, standing by, acting as audience to this little drama, and saw Ally's anxious look at her brother as she passed into the house, and Walter's keen consciousness of the footman's scorn and Mrs. Penton's toleration. He did

not notice herself, and evidently thought her a person of no importance, which for the moment piqued Mab. But when he paused to let her, a little nobody, as he thought, pass before him, all her romantic sympathies came back to her mind. And so it came to pass that it was not Ally who was the most excited of the young persons thus brought together in what seemed an accidental way; nor, perhaps, could their hearts have been seen, was it she who was the most likely to have met her fate.

the children are endless) how could you have anything to

girl who probably had the life of a nursery maid (for

RECKONING WITHOUT THEIR HOST.

MRS. RUSSELL PENTON was not without her share of the general embarrassment. There was never any quarrel in the stately, well-regulated house. An angry look, a hot word, were things unknown. But still she knew very well when her husband was not in accord with her. His smile was quite enough. Matters had gone very far indeed before he whistled, but sometimes things did even go so far as that. This time there was no such climax. His lips had never even formed themselves into the shape of a whistle; and in his countenance there was no suspicion of a sarcastic meaning. But she knew that his thoughts were not as her thoughts. She knew even, which was a rare thing, that he was against her, that he meant to act more or less in a contrary sense. The young people whom she had invited against her will, whom she meant to be-not unkind to, that was not in her nature, but to treat at least no better than was necessary, he meant to take up and show the greatest attention to. She was aware of this and it troubled her. How was it possible that it should not trouble her? It was an accusation, nay, more, a verdict delivered against herself. And she saw even that little Mab was of the same way of thinking, that she was interested in the new-comers, that her questions had a meaning, and that even that little thing was critical of her attitude, and blamed her, actually blamed her, though of course she did not venture to say anything. This made Alicia Penton angry and sore within herself; and there was something still more disagreeable which lent a sting to all the rest; and that was that she was

her own worse critic, and felt herself poor and small and

petty, and acting an ignoble part.

But there was yet a deeper depth to which she never had expected to descend. Sir Walter in his great age changed his habits for nobody. He was never seen in the drawingroom except on rare occasions for an hour after dinner, when he felt better than usual. He thought the library the most cheerful as well as the warmest room in the house, and when visitors came it was expected that they should pay their respects to him there. Sir Walter had been a little restless on the day the young Pentons arrived. It had not seemed to Alicia that they were important enough to be presented to her father in a solemn interview. "There is no reason why you should trouble about them," she said. "You will see them at dinner, that will be soon enough." And the old gentleman had made no particular reply. Therefore when they arrived, as has been related, Mrs. Penton led them upstairs to the drawing-room and gave them This room was very light, very bright, with its long range of large windows, of which the great breadth of the landscape below seemed to form a part, and the pillars which divided it into a sort of nave and aisles gave occasion for many little separate centers for conversation and the intercourse of congenial groups in a large company. Ally and Walter entered the room with dazzled eyes. was to them as a dwelling of the gods. Had this visit been paid only a few weeks before they would have secretly taken possession, imagining how here and here each should have their special corner. The effect it produced on Walter now, as he looked round, too proud to show that it was new to him, too intent upon keeping all trace of anger out of his countenance to be otherwise than preternaturally grave, and on Ally, regarding its grandeur with an awe that was beyond words, was very different, but in both cases it was very profound. Ally thought with a movement of mingled regret and thankfulness how right mother was! What could we have done, she said to herself, in this great room? It would have been delightful indeed for the children, who on wet days would never have wanted to go out with such a place to play in. But then how could any one have had the heart to give this up to the children? She could not talk to Mrs. Penton, who maintained a little formal conversation, her mind was so full of this thought. It was

beautiful. It was a magnificent room. It was wonderful to think that it might have belonged to us. But mother was right—oh, how right mother was! What could we have done with it? How could we even have furnished it? Ally said to herself; but she knew that Wat was annoyed when she allowed herself to say, "What a lovely room!"

"It is a very handsome room. I don't think there is anything like it in the county," said Mrs. Russell Penton. "I ought not perhaps to say so, for we have done a great deal to it ourselves. But I may allow that it is very perfect.

You have never seen it before?"

"The view is fine," said Wat, going to the window before his sister could answer; "it is so extensive that it makes any room look small." He was so much out of temper and out of heart that he could not help making an attempt to "take" this serene great lady "down."

She smiled in her dignified way, which made the young critic feel very small. "We seldom hear any fault found

with its size," she said.

And then, to the astonishment of Walter, the little person, whom he had allowed of his grace to pass in before him, came into the room, and took her place and addressed the great lady in the most familiar terms. "Aunt Gerald," she said, "we are all a kind of cousins, don't you think? We must be a kind of cousins, though we never saw each other before, for you are aunt to them and you are aunt to me, so of course we are friends by nature;" and with that she put out her hand not only to Ally, whose face brightened all over at this cordial greeting, but to Wat, who stood hanging over them like a cloud, not knowing what to say.

"You are mistaken, Mab," said Mrs. Russell Penton; "I am not aunt but cousin to—to—" she did not know what to call them—" to my young relations," she said at

last.

"That comes exactly to the same thing—an old cousin is always aunt," said Mab, settling herself on her seat like a little pigeon. She was very plump, pink and white, with very keen little blue eyes, not at all unlike a doll. There was nothing imposing in her appearance. "I am Mab," she said, "and are you Alicia, like Aunt Gerald? Do all your brothers and sisters call you so? It is such a long name. I have neither brothers nor sisters."

"Oh, what a pity," said gentle Ally, who had bright-

ened as soon as this new companion came in with all the

freemasonry of youth.

"Do you think so? but then they say it is very good in another way. I have nobody to be fond of me though, nobody to bully me. Big brothers bully you dreadfully, don't they?" She cast a look at Walter, inviting him to approach. She was not shy, and he was standing about, not knowing what to do with himself. Walter would have been awkward in any circumstances, having no acquaintance with strange ladies or habit of attending them at tea. He drew a step nearer indeed, but her advances did not put him at his ease; for had he not taken her for a lady's-maid? though this she did not know.

Mrs. Russell Penton left them thus to make acquaintance, as Mab said, but not willingly. She had to obey a summons from Sir Walter. Sir Walter had been a great deal more restless than usual for the last day or two. There was nothing the matter with him, he said himself, and the doctor said he was quite well, there was not the slightest reason for any uneasiness; but yet he was restless-constantly sending for Alicia when she was not with him, changing his position, finding fault with his newspapers, and that all the little paraphernalia he loved was not sufficiently at hand. Mrs. Russell Penton was always ready when her father wanted her. She would have let nothing, not the most exalted visitor, stand between her and her father, and though she was by no means desirous of leaving these young people together, yet she got up and left them without a word. It was, however, a little too much for her when Sir Walter exclaimed almost before she got into the room, "Where are those children? I suppose they have come, Alicia. Why are you hiding them away from me?"

"The children!—what children? Father, I don't know what you mean."

"What children are there to interest me now, except the one set?" said Sir Walter, peevishly. "Edward's children of course I mean."

"Edward's children!"

"Am I growing stupid, or what is the matter with you, Alicia? I don't generally have to repeat the same thing a dozen times over. Naturally it is Edward's son I want. A

man can scarcely help feeling a certain interest in the boy who is his heir."

"I am afraid I am very stupid, father. I thought we

had settled_'' lo hool so

"Yes, yes, yes," said the old man: "it is all settled just as you liked, I know; but all the same the boy is my heir."

Mrs. Russell Penton made no reply. Sir Walter was old enough to be allowed to say what he would without contradiction; but the statement altogether was extremely galling to her. "Settled just as you liked." It was not as she liked but as he liked. It was he who had moved in it, though it was for her benefit. Though she could not deny that the desire of her life was to possess Penton, to remain in her home, yet she was proudly conscious that she would have taken no step in the matter, done nothing, of her own accord. It was he who had settled it; and now he turned upon her, and asked for the boy who was his heir! Everybody was hard upon Alicia at this moment of fate. They all seemed to have united against her-her husband, the little girl even whom she had wished to defend from fortune-hunters-and now her father himself! If she had been twenty instead of fifty she could not have felt this universal abandonment more. But the practice of so many years was strong upon her. She would not oppose or make any objections to what he wished, though it was of the last repugnance to herself.

"I should have liked," said the old man, "to see Edward too; when one has advanced so far as I have on the path of life, Alicia, likes and dislikes die away—and prejudices. I may have been too subject to prejudice. Edward never was very much to calculate upon. He had no character; he never could hold his own; but there was very little harm in him, as little harm as good you will perhaps say. Bring me the boy. He will be the same as I, Sir Walter Penton, when his turn comes, and it will not be long before his turn comes. Edward will never last to be an old man like me. He hasn't got it in him; he hasn't stuff enough. The young one will be Sir Walter—Sir Walter Penton, the old name. The tenth, isn't it—Walter the tenth—if we were to count as some of the foreign houses do?"

—if we were to count as some of the foreign houses do?" Oh, father, don't!" cried Alicia. To think he could

talk, almost jest, about another Walter!

He looked up at her quickly, as if out of a little gathering confusion, seeing for the moment what she meant.

"Eh! well, we must not always dwell on one subject-

must not dwell upon it. Let me see the boy."

Mrs. Russell Penton rang the bell and gave a message, out of which it was almost impossible to keep an angry ring of impatience. "Tell the young gentleman who is in the drawing-room, he who arrived half an hour ago—you understand—that Sir Walter would like to see him. Show him

the way.'

"Why don't you speak of him by his name, Alicia? Young Mr. Penton, Mr. Walter Penton, my successor, you know, Bowker, that is to be. Say I seldom leave my room, and that I should be pleased to see him here. My dear," he went on, "the servants always act upon the cue you give them, and they ought to be very respectful to the rising sun, you know. It is bad policy to set them out of

favor with the rising sun."

Alicia's heart was too full for speech. She kept behind her father's chair, arranging one or two little things which required no arrangement, keeping command over herself by a strong effort. A little more, she felt, and she would no longer be able to do this. That even the servants should have such a suggestion made to them, that Edward's boy was the heir! Had her father departed from the resolution which was, she declared to herself passionately, his own resolution, not suggested by her? Had he forgotten? Was this some wavering of the mind which might invalidate all future acts of his? She felt on the edge of an outbreak of feeling such as had rarely occurred in her reserved and dignified life, and at the same time she felt herself turned to stone. The old man went on talking, more than usual, more cheerfully than usual, as if something exhilarating and pleasant was about to happen, but she paid little attention to what he said. She stood behind, full of a new and anxious interest, when the door opened and Wat, timid, but on his guard, not knowing what might be wanted with him, half defiant, and yet more impressed and awed than he liked to show, came into the room. Mrs. Russell Penton gave him no aid. She said, "This is Edward's son, father." It annoyed her to name him by his name, though there was no doubt that he had a right to it, as good a right as any one. She could not form her lips to

say Walter Penton. But what she failed in Sir Walter made up. He half rose from his chair, which was a thing he rarely did, and held out both his hands. "Ah, Walter! I'm glad to see you, very glad to see you," he said. He took the youth's hands in those large, soft, aged ones of his, and drew him close and looked at him, as he might have looked at a grandson: and there was enough resemblance between them to justify the suggestion. "So this is Walter," he went on, "I'm very glad to see you, my boy. You're the last of the old stock-no, not the last either, for I hear there's plenty of you, boys and girls, Alicia '-the old man's voice trembled a little, tears came into his eyes, as they do so easily at his age-" Alicia, don't you think he has a look of-of-another Walter? About the eyes-and his mouth? He is a true Penton. My dear, I'm very sorry if I've vexed you. I-I like to see it. I could think he had lived and done well and left us a son to come after him,

my poor boy!"

And old Sir Walter for a moment broke down, and lifted up his voice and wept, running the little wail of irrepressible emotion into a cough to veil it, and swinging Wat's hand back and forward in his own. Alicia stood as long as she could behind him, holding herself down. But when her father's voice broke, and he called her attention to that resemblance, she could bear it no longer. She walked away out of the room without a word. Had she not seen it—that resemblance? and it was an offense to her, a bitter injury. He had neither lived nor done well, that other Walter, the brother of her love and of her pride. He had crushed her heart under his feet, beaten down her pride, torn her being asunder; and now to have it pointed out to her that this insignificant boy, who was not even to be the heir, whose birthright was being sold over his head, that he was a true Penton and like her brother! She could bear it no longer. Not even the recollection that this emotion might injure her father, that he wanted care to soothe him, sufficed to make her capable of restraining the passion which had seized possession of her. She went away quickly, silent, saying nothing. It was more than she could bear.

In the corridor she met her husband, between whom and her there was, she was conscious, a certain mist, also on account of this boy. Had all been as usual in other ways she would have passed him by with a sense in her heart of a certain separation and injury: but a woman must have some one to claim support from, and after all he was her husband, bound to stand by her, whatever questions might arise between them. She went up to him with an instinctive feeling of having a right to his sympathy in any case, even if he should disapprove, and put her hand within his arm with a hasty appealing movement, quite unusual with her. No man was more easily affected than Russell Penton by such an appeal. He put his hand upon hers, and looked at her tenderly. "What is it, my dear?" he said.

"Nothing, Gerald; except that I want to lean upon you for a moment because I have more than I can bear; though

you disapprove of me," she said. To all mobile of the said.

He held her close to him, full of pity and tenderness. "Lean, Alicia, whether I approve or disapprove;" and he added, "I know that all this is hard upon you." He sympathized with her at least, if not with the tenor of her thoughts, ed of high standard and alosno

She made on further explanation, nor did he ask for it. After a moment she said, "Gerald, do you know whether a sudden change of mind, abandoning one way of thinking for another, is supposed to be a bad sign-of health, I

mean? becole tant elizane prid of armier bluoda eda llid gaitiav He paused a moment and looked at her, with an evident question as to whether it was she who had changed her mind. But that look was enough to show that, though she was suffering she was firm as ever, and a glance she gave toward the closed door of the library enlightened him. "I should not think it was a very good sign-of health," he said. ore unusual than a ball at Penton.

"It shows a weakening—it shows a relaxation of the fiber-a-that is what I think. And so complete a change! Gerald, my father shall do nothing he does not wish to do

"I never supposed you would wish that, my dear. What is it? Don't form too hasty a judgment. Has he said that he does not want to do anything that has been spoken of between you?"

"No, he has spoken of nothing. He has got Edward Penton's boy with him, and he is quite affectionate, talk-

ing of a resemblance-'

"Alicia, is it Penton you are thinking so much of?"

"No, no," she cried, leaning upon his shoulder, burst-

ing at last into sudden, long-repressed tears. "No, no!" It is my brother, my brother! my Walter! He who should have been, who ought to have been- Gerald, it may be wrong, but I can't bear it, I can't bear it. He talks of a resemblance—"

"Alicia, I see it too. I thought it would soften your

heart." she cried, "how little you know;" and, flinging herself from him, with a cry of mortification and disappointment, she flew into her own room and closed the door.

Russell Penton stood looking after her with a troubled countenance, and then he began to walk slowly up and down the corridor. He did not approve, and perhaps, as she said in her passion, did not understand this strange revulsion of all gentle sentiments. But it went to his heart to leave her to herself in a moment of pain, even though the pain was of her own inflicting. He did not follow or attempt to console her. She was not a girl to be soothed and persuaded out of this outburst of passionate feeling. He respected her individuality, her age, her power to bear her own burdens; but because his heart was very tender, though he did not disturb Alicia, he walked up and down, waiting till she should return to him, outside that closed door.

CHAPTER XX.

SIR WALTER AND HIS HEIR.

THERE was a ball at Penton that evening.

Nothing was more unusual than a ball at Penton. The family festivities were usually of the gravest kind. Solemn dinner-parties, duties of society, collections of people who had to be asked, county potentates, with whom Alicia and her husband had dined, and who had to be repaid. Nothing under fifty, unless it might be by chance now and then a newly married couple added in the natural progress of events to the circle of the best people, ever appeared at that luxurious but somewhat heavy table. Mr. Russell Penton chafed, but endured, and talked politics with the squires, and did his best to relieve the ponderous propriety of their wives. He was good at making the best of things; and when he could do nothing more he put on a brave face and supported it. But now, for once in a way, youth was

paramount. The young people from Penton Hook, who had little acquaintance with the other young people of all the county families who were invited, had not so much as heard of what was in store for them; and Ally reflected, when she did hear, that it was something like an inspiration which had induced her mother to provide her with that second evening dress, which was quite suitable for a first ball. It was very simple, very white, fit for her age, her slim figure, and youthful aspect. But it was not for Ally that the ball was given. "I believe it is my ball," Mab had told her. "It is my first visit to Penton since I was a child, and now that I am out Aunt Alicia thinks that something has to be done for me. Are you 'out'? but you must be, of course, or you would not have been asked for to-day."

"I don't know whether I am out or not," said Ally, with a blush; "but I don't think mother, if she knew, would have any objection. I am eighteen. I have never been at a ball before. Perhaps I may not dance in the right way."

"Oh, nonsense," said Mab, "whatever way you dance you have only to stick to it and say that is the right way."

The two girls were alone, for Walter had just been mysteriously called out of the room. And though Ally's thoughts followed her brother with anxiety, wondering what could be wanted with him, yet the novelty of the scene and the companionship of a girl of her own age so warmed her heart, that she forgot the precautions and cares which had been so impressed upon her, and began to talk and to act by natural impulse without thought.

"I should never have the courage to do that," she said; "I have never even seen people dancing. We had a few lessons when we were children, and sometimes we try with Wat, just to see, if we ever had a chance, how we could get on. Anne plays and I have a turn, or else Anne has a turn and I play."

"Is Anne your only sister?"

"Oh, no," cried Ally, with a laugh at the impossibility of such a suggestion; "there are two in the nursery. We are two boys and two girls, grown up; and the little ones are just the same, two and two."

"How unfair things are in this world," said Mab; "to

think there should be so many of you and only one of

"It is strange," said Ally; "but not perhaps unfair: for when there is only one your father and mother must seem so much nearer to you—you must feel that they belong altogether to you."

"Perhaps. Mamma died when I was born, so I never knew her at all. Papa is dead too. Don't let us talk of that. I never think of things that are disagreeable," said Mab, "what is the use? It can't do you any good, it only makes you worse thinking. Tell me about to-night. Who will be here? are they nice? are they good dancers? Tell me which is the best dancer about, that I may ask Uncle Gerald to introduce him to me."

"I know nobody," said Ally.

"Nobody! though you have lived here all your life! Oh, you little envious thing! You want to keep them all to yourself; you won't tell me! Very well. I have no doubt your brother dances well; he has the figure for it. I shall dance with him all the night."

"Oh, no; that would be too much. But I hope you will dance with him to give him a little confidence. Indeed, what I say is quite true. We don't know anybody; we have been brought up so—quietly. We never were here

before."

"Oh!" Mab said. She was an inquiring young woman, and she had not believed what she had heard. She had made very light of Mrs. Russell Penton's description of her relations as "not in our sphere." As Ally spoke, how-ever, Mab's eyes opened wider; she began to realize the real position. The misfortunes of the young Pentons had gone further than she had believed; they were poor relations in the conventional sense of the word, people to be thrust into a corner, to be allowed to shift for themselves. But not if they have some one to look after them, Mab said to herself. She took up their cause with heat and fury. "You shall soon know everybody," she cried; "Uncle Gerald will see to that, and so shall I." It then occurred to her that Ally might resent this as an offer of patronage, and she added, hastily, "Promise to introduce all your good partners to me, and I will introduce all mine to you. Is that settled? Oh, then between us we shall soon find out which are the best."

How kind she was! To be sure, Cousin Alicia was not very kind; there was nothing effusive about her. No doubt she must mean to be agreeable, or why should she have asked them? though her manner was not very cordial. But as for Mab—who insisted that she was to be called Mab, and not Miss Russell—she was more "nice" than anything that Ally could have imagined possible. She was like a new sister, she was like one of ourselves. So Ally declared with warmth to Wat, who knocked at the door of her room just as she was beginning to dress for dinner, with a face full of importance and gravity. He was quite indifferent as to Mab, but he told her of Sir Walter with a sort of enthusiasm. "He said I must not forget that I was his heir, and that he would like to make a man of me. What do you think he could mean, Ally, by saying that I

was his heir, after all?"

Ally could not tell; how was it possible that she should tell, as she had not heard or seen the interview? And besides, she was not the clever one to be able to divine what people meant. She threw, however, a little light on the subject by suggesting that perhaps he meant the title. "For you must be heir to the title, Wat," she said; "nobody can take that from you." Wat's countenance fell at this, for he did not like to think that it was merely the baronetcy Sir Walter meant when he called him his heir. However, there was not very much time to talk. Walter had to hurry to his room to get ready, and Ally to finish dressing her hair and to put on her dress, with a curious feeling of strangeness which took away her pleasure in it. Of course, you really could see yourself better in the long, large glass than in the little ones at the Hook, but an admiring audience of mother and sisters are more exhilarating to dress to than the noblest mirror. And Ally felt sad and excited—not excited as a girl generally does before her first ball, but filled with all manner of indefinite alarms. There was nothing to be alarmed about. Cousin Alicia, however cold she might seem, would not suffer, after all, her own relations to be neglected. And then there was Mab. The girl felt the confused prospect before her of pleasurewhich she was not sure would be pleasure, or anything but a disguised pain—to grow brighter and more natural when she thought of Mab. And that compact about the partners. Ally wondered whether she would get any partners,

or if they would all overlook her in her corner, a little girl

whom nobody knew.

And then came dinner, an agitating but brilliant ceremonial, with a confusing brightness of lights and flowers and ferns, and everything so strange, and the whole disturbed by an underlying dread of doing something wrong. Sir Walter at the head of the table, a strange image of age and tremulous state, looked to Ally like an old sage in a picture, or an old magician, one in whose very look there were strange powers. She scarcely raised her eyes when she was presented to him, but courtesied to the ground as if he had been a king, and did not feel at all sure that the look he gave her might not work some miraculous change in her. But Sir Walter did not take much notice of Ally, his attention was all given to Wat, whom he desired to have near him, and at whom he looked with that pleasure near to tears which betrays the weakness of old age. When dinner was over the old man would not have Russell Penton's arm, nor would he let his servant help him. He signed to Wat, to the astonishment of all, and shuffled into the ball-room, where half of the county were assembled, leaning on the arm of the youth, who was no less astonished than everybody else. Sir Walter was very tall, taller than Wat, and he was heavy, and leaned his full weight upon the slight boy of twenty, who required all his strength to keep steady and give the necessary support. Mrs. Russell Penton, who was already in the ball-room receiving her guests, grew pale like clay when she saw this group approach. "Father, let me take you to your seat," she said, hurriedly, neglecting a family newly arrived too, who were waiting for her greeting. "Nothing of the kind, Alicia. I'm well off to-night. I've got Wat, you see," the old gentleman said, and walked up the whole length of the room, smiling and bowing, and pausing to speak to the most honored guests. "This is young Walter," he said, introducing the boy, "don't you know? My successor, you know," with that old tremulous laugh which was half a cough, and brought the tears to his eyes. The people who knew the circumstances—and who did not know the circumstances?—stared and asked each other what could have happened to bring about such a revolution. Sir Walter had been seated at the upper end of his room he dismissed his young attendant with a caressing tap upon

his arm. "Now go, boy, and find your partner. You must open the ball, you know; nothing can be done till you've opened the ball. Go, go, and don't keep everybody waiting." Poor Wat could not tell what to do when raised to this giddy height without any preparation, not knowing anybody, very doubtful about his own powers as a dancer, or what was the etiquette of such performances. Russell Penton almost thrust Mab upon him in his pause of bewilderment. And from where she stood at the door, stately and rigid, Alicia looked with a blank gaze upon this boy, this poor relation, whom her eyes had avoided, whom she had included almost perforce in her reluctant invitation to his sister, but who was thus made the principal figure in her entertainment. She had been reluctant to ask Ally, but the brother had been put in quite against her will. His name, his look, the resemblance which she refused to see, but yet could not ignore, were all intolerable to her; but her father's sudden fancy for the boy, his change of sentiment so inconceivable, so unexplainable, struck chill to her heart.

When she was released from her duties of receiving she found out the doctor among the crowd of more important guests, and begged him to give her his opinions.

"How do you think my father looks?"

"Extremely well—better than he has looked for years—

as if he had taken a new lease," the doctor said.

Mrs. Russell Penton shook her head. She herself was very pale; her eyes shone with a strange, unusual luster. She said to herself that it was superstition. Why should not an old man take a passing fancy? It would pass with the occasion, it might mean nothing. There was no reason to suppose that this wonderful contradiction, this apparent revolution in his mind, was anything but a sudden impression, an effect—though so different from that in herself—of the stirring up of old associations. She sat down beside her father, and did her best to subdue the state of unusual exhilaration in which he was.

"You must not stay longer than you feel disposed," she

said, with her hand upon his arm.

"Oh, don't fear for me, Alicia. I am wonderfully well; I never felt better. Look at young Wat, with that little partner of his! Isn't she the little heiress? I shouldn't wonder if he carried off the prize, the rascal! eh, Gerald?

and very convenient too in the low state of the exchequer,' the old gentleman said; and he chuckled and laughed with the water in his eyes, while his daughter by his side felt herself turning to stone. It was not, she said to herself passionately, for fear of his changing his mind. It was that a change so extraordinary looked to her anxious eyes like one of those mental excitements which are said to go before the end.

It was Ally's own fault that she got behind backs, and escaped the attentions which Mr. Russell Penton, absorbed, he, too, in this curious little drama, had intended to pay her. Ally, in the shade of larger interests, fell out of that importance which ought to belong to a débutante. It was a great consolation to her when young Rochford suddenly appeared, excited and delighted, anxious to know if she had still a dance to give him. Poor Ally had as many dances as she pleased to give, and knew nobody in all this bewildering brilliant assembly so well as himself. She was unspeakably relieved and comforted when he introduced her to his sisters and his mother, who, half out of natural kindness, and half because of the distinction of having a Miss Penton-who was a real Penton, though a poor one, in the great house which bore her name-under her wing, encouraged Ally to take refuge by her side, and talked to her and soothed her out of the frightened state of loneliness and abandonment which is perhaps more miserable to a young creature expecting pleasure in a ball-room than anywhere else. They got her partners among their own set, the guests who were, so to speak, below the salt, the secondary strata in the great assembly—who indeed were quite good enough for Ally—quite as good as any one, though without handles to their names or any prestige in society. Mab, when she met her new friend, stopped indeed to whisper aside, "Where have you picked up that man?" but Mab, too, was fully occupied with her own affairs. And Walter was altogether swept away from his sister. He made more acquaintances in the next hour or two than he had done for all the previous years of his life. If his head was a little turned, if he felt that some wonderful unthought-of merit must suddenly have come out in him, who could wonder? He met Ally now and then, or saw her dancing and happy; and, with a half-guilty gladness, feeling that there was no necessity for him to take her

upon his shoulders, abandoned himself to the intoxication of his own success. It was his first; it was totally unex-

pected, and it was very sweet.

The time came, however, as the time always comes, when all this fascination and delight came to an end. Sir Walter had retired hours before; and now the last lingering guest had departed, the last carriage had rolled away, the lights were extinguished, the great house had fallen into silence and slumber after the fatigue of excitement and enjoyment. Walter did not know how late, or rather how early it was, deep in the heart of the wintery darkness, toward morning, when he was roused from his first sleep by sudden sounds in the corridor, and voices outside his door. A sound of other doors opening and shutting, of confused cries and footsteps, made it evident to him that something unusual had occurred, as he sprung up startled and uneasy. The first thought that springs to the mind of every inexperienced adventurer in this world, that the something which has happened must specially affect himself, made him think of some catastrophe at home, and made him clutch at his clothes and dress himself hurriedly, with a certainty that he was about to be summoned. There flashed through Walter's mind with an extraordinary rapidity, as if flung across his consciousness from without, the possibility that it might be his father—the thought that in that case it would actually be he, as old Sir Walter had said, who would be- The thought was guilty, barbarous, unnatural. It did not originate in the young man's own confused, half-awakened mind. What is there outside of us that flings such horrible realizations across our consciousness without any will of ours? He had not time to feel how horrible it was when he recognized Mrs. Russell Penton's voice outside in hurried tones, sharp with some urgent necessity. "Some one must go for Edward Penton and Rochford-Rochford and the papers. Who can we send, who will understand? Oh, Gerald, not you, not you. Don't let me be alone at this moment-let all go rather than that."

"If it must be done, I am the only man to do it, Alicia

—if his last hours are to be disturbed for this."

"His last hours! they are disturbed already; he can not rest; he calls for Rochford, Rochford! It is no doing of mine—that you should think so of me at this moment! How am I to quiet my father? But, Gerald, don't leave

me-don't you leave me?" she cried.

Walter threw his door open in the excitement of his sudden waking. The light flooded in his eyes, dazzling him. "I'll go," he said, unable to see anything except a white figure and a dark one standing together in the flicker of the light which was blown about by the air from some open window. Presently Alicia Penton's face became visible to him, pale, with a lace handkerchief tied over her head, which changed her aspect strangely, and her eyes full of agitation and nervous unrest. She fell back when she saw him, crying, with a sharp tone of pain, "You!"

"I'm wide awake," said the young man. "I thought

something must have happened at home. If there's a horse or a dog-cart I'll go."

"Sir Walter is very ill," said Russell Penton. "I hope not dying, but very ill. And you know what they want, to settle the matter with your father and get that deed executed at once."

"I'll go," said Wat, half sullen in the repetition, in the sudden perception that burst upon him once again from outside with all its train of ready-made thoughts—that if he lingered, if he delayed, it might be too late, and Penton would still be his-that there was no duty laid upon him to go at all, contrary to his interests, contrary to all his desires that—that— He gave a little stamp with his foot and repeated, doggedly, "I said I'd go. I'm ready. To bring Rochford and the papers, to bring my father; that's what I've got to do."

"That is what Mrs. Penton does not venture to ask of

"Oh, boy," cried Alicia, lifting up her hands, "go, go! It is not for me, it is for my father. I don't know what he means to do, but he can not rest till it is done. He can't die, do you know what I mean? It is on his mind, and he can't get free—for the love of Heaven go!"

"This moment," Walter said.

MODELE STORY OF THE PROPERTY OF STORY

CHAPTER XXI.

A NIGHT DRIVE.

WALTER PENTON found himself facing the penetrating wind of the December morning which was in its stillness

and blackness the dead of night, before he had fully realized what was happening. A number of keen perceptions indeed had flashed across his mind, yet it felt like nothing so much as the continuation of a dream when, enveloped in an atmosphere of sound, the horse's hoofs clanging upon the frosty road, the wheels grinding, the harness jingling, all doubled in clamor by the surrounding stillness, he was carried along between black, half-visible hedge-rows, under dark bare trees, swaying in the wind, through shut-up silent villages, and the death-like slumber of the wide country, bound hard in frost and sleep. A groom less awake than himself, shivering and excited, but speechless, and affording him no sense of human companionship, was by his side, driving mechanically, but at the highest speed, along a road which to unaccustomed eyes was invisible. The scene was a very strange one after the intoxicating dream of the evening, with all its phantasmagoria of light and praise, and confused delight and pride. The blackness before him was as heavy as the preliminary vision had been dazzling; the air blew keen, cutting the very breath which rose in white wreaths like smoke from his lips. Where was he rushing? carried along by a movement which was not his own, an unwilling agent, acting in spite of himself. Sir Walter's old head, crowned with white locks, looking upon him with so much genial approbation, Mrs. Russell Penton's drawn and rigid countenance, the disturbed face of her husband, the plump simplicity of little Mab, a sort of floating rosy cherub among all these older countenances, seemed to flit before him in the mists; the music echoed, the lights glowed; and then came the darkness, the ring of the hoofs and wheels, the stinging freshness of the cold air, and all dark, motionless, silent around. He was in a vision still. The German poem in which the lady is carried off behind the black horseman, tramp, tramp across the land, splash, splash across the sea, seemed to ring in his ears through his dream. He was preternaturally awake and aware of everything, yet his eyes were in a mist of semi-consciousness, and all the half-visible veiled sights about him seemed like the vague and flying landscape of uneasy fever-journeys. The cold, which half stupefied him, by some strange process only intensified these sensations; his companion and he never exchanged a word. He was not acquainted even with the lie of the roads, the ascents

and descents, or of what houses those were which looked through the darkness from time to time surrounded by spectral trees. After awhile an overwhelming desire for sleep seized him. He had visions of the bed, all white and in order, which he had left behind; of the chair by the fire which he had been roused out of; of his own room at home, all silent, cold, waiting for him. If only he could make a spring out of this moving, jingling thing, out of the stinging of the air, and get into the quiet and warmth and

sleep!

When the groom spoke Walter woke up again, broad awake from what must have been a doze. "Shall we go to the Hook or to Mr. Rochford's first, sir?" the man asked. Walter started bolt upright, and came to himself. They were dashing through his own village, and a moment later he would have passed without seeing the white blinds at the windows of Crockford's cottage which shone through the gloom. He waved his hand in the direction of his home, thinking that to give his father the benefit of a warning was worth the trouble before he went on. He took the reins into his own hands, knowing the steep descent toward the house, which was ticklish even in daylight, and this touch of practical necessity brought him to his full senses, and for the first time dispersed the mists. He perceived now fully what he was doing. As the horse's steps sunk half stumbling down the invisible abyss of the way, Walter felt, with a tingling of his ears and a sinking of his heart, that he also was dropping from the brilliant mount of possibility which he had been ascending with delighted feet. It had seemed as if all the decisions of fate might be reversed, as if he were to be the arbiter of his own fortune, as if— And now it was his hand that was to seal his own fate. Such thoughts and questionings, such rebellions against a duty which is not to be escaped, may go on while one is executing that very duty without any practical effect.
Walter pushed on all the time as well as the difficulties of the path would allow. He dashed into the little domain at the Hook with an energy that made the still air tingle, feeling as if he were himself inside, and starting to the shock of the sudden awakening in the midst of the dark-ness. The groom, who had opened the gate, ran on and gave peal after peal to the bell, and presently the house, which had stood so dead and dark in the midst of the

spectral trees, awoke with a start. One or two windows were opened simultaneously. "Who is there?" cried Mr. Penton, in a bass tone, while a sudden wavering treble with terror in it shrieked out, "Oh, it's Wat, it's Wat!" and "Something has happened to Ally!" with a cry that pene-

"Father," said Wat, "nothing is the matter with either of us. Sir Walter's very ill. I'm going to fetch Rochford and the papers. You have to come too, to sign. Be ready

when I come back."

"Rochford and the papers! To sign! What do you

mean? In the middle of the night!"

And here there came a white figure to the window, crying "Ally-are you sure, are you sure, Wat, all's right with Ally?" through the midst of the question and reply.

"I tell you, father, Sir Walter's dying. Be ready, be at the cross-roads if you can in half an hour. It's three miles further, but this horse goes like the wind. Don't stop for anything. In half an hour. It's true; it's not a dream," he shouted, turning round to go away.

"Wat! dying, did you say? And a ball in the house!

Wat! had they got the doctor? what was it? Wat!"

"I can't stay. He may be dead before we get there. In half an hour at the cross-roads," cried the youth, turning the horse with dangerous abruptness: and in a minute or two all was still again. The darkness and silence closed round, and the astonished family, terrified, startled out of the profound quiet of their repose, blinked, dazzled at the newly lit candles, and said to each other wildly, "Dying! perhaps before they can get there. But Ally-Ally and Wat are all right, thank God!" And soon there was a twinkle of lights from window to window. The servants got up last, being less easily awakened; but Mrs. Penton had already some tea ready for her husband, and Anne, in a little dressing-gown, was collecting the warmest coats and wrappers which the family possessed, before Mr. Penton himself, very grave, almost tremulous, in the sudden emergency, could get ready. His fingers trembled over his buttons. Sir Walter, whom he had not seen for years; the old man who had been as one who would never die; the kind uncle of old; the causeless antagonist of later years. It was strange beyond measure to Edward Penton to be thus sent for with such startling and tragic suddenness in the

middle of the night. "What shall I do?" he said, wringing his hands, "if he should die before-" "Oh, Edward, make haste; lose no time; a minute may do it," cried his wife in her anxiety. They almost pushed him out, Anne running before to see that the gate was open, with a lantern to show him the way. There was no one else to carry the lantern, and she went with him up the steep ascent with the flicker of the light flaring unsteadily about the dark road. She was very thinly clad, with an ulster over her dressing-gown, and her poor little feet thrust into her boots, and shivered as she ran, and stumbled with the lantern, which was too big for her, her father being too much absorbed in his thoughts to perceive what a burden it was. Anne shivered, but not altogether from cold. Her heart was beating high, the quick pulsations vibrating to her lively brain, and alarm, awe, the indefinite melancholy and horror of death mingling with that keen exhilaration of quickened living which any tremendous event brings with it to the young. It was a wonderful thing to be happening, to be mixed up in, to realize so much more vividly than even her father did. Her very lantern and course along this steep and dark road in the middle of the night gave a thrilling consciousness to Anne of having a great deal to do with it, of being really an actor in the drama. She would not leave him till the lights of the dog-cart showed far off, coming on swiftly, silently, through the dark, before any sound could be heard. It was all wonderful; the portentous darkness, without a star; the cold, the silence, the consciousness of what was going on; the sense, which took her breath away, that perhaps after all the lawyer, with his papers, and her father, who had to sign them, might be too late; that even now, when she turned to make her way, trembling a little with cold and fright and nervous excitement, Sir Walter might be dead, and Penton be "ours!" Mother would be my lady in any case; the servants would have to be taught to call her so. And all this might be determined in an hour or two, perhaps before daylight! Anne shivered more and more, and was afraid of the darkness under the hedge-rows as she went home alone with the heavy lantern. She had a great mind to leave it under the hedge and run all the way home, without minding the dark; but such darkness as that was not a thing which a girl could make up her resolution not to mind.

Walter had gone on from the Hook with this issue plainer and plainer in his mind—if he but delayed a little, did not press the horse, took it more easily, he might, without reproach, without harm, be late, and so after all preserve his birthright. He said to himself that if the papers were but there Mrs. Russell Penton would have them signed whatever might happen, if her father was in the act of dying she would have them signed. There was nothing she would not do to secure her end. Had she not secured himself, even himself, who was so much against her, whose life was more in question than any one's, to do her will and serve her purpose? And when he could not resist her who could? She would get her way. She would make the old man's melting, his sudden partiality, come to nothing; and again Walter, whose head had been turned a little, who had begun to feel more than ever what it would be to be the heir of Penton, would be replaced in the original obscurity of his poor relationship. And all this might be changed if he but delayed a little, went softly, spared the horse! All the time, while these thoughts were going through his mind, he was pressing on with vehemence, making the animal fly through the darkness. He did not hesitate a moment practically, though he said all this to himself. What he did and what he thought seemed to run on in two parallel lines without deflection, without any effect upon each other. It was all in his hands to do as he pleased: no one could blame him or say anything to him if he ceased to press on, if he let the reins drop loosely. But it never occurred to him to do so. Then there was the possibility that Rochford might not be ready at once, that he might not be able to find the papers over which he had so dawdled, that he might not be ready to jump up as Walter had done. What need was there to press him, to make the same startling summons at his door that had been made at the Hook, to insist on an answer? There seemed no need to take any active steps in order to upset the family arrangement, to turn everything the other way. All that it was necessary to do was only to let the reins fall on the horse's neck, to urge him forward no more.

They arrived thus flying at the gates of the Rochfords' house, a big red-brick mansion just outside the town. There was a light in the coachman's cottage which answered the purpose of a lodge, and the coachman himself

came out, half scared, half awake, to open to the pair of came out, half scared, half awake, to open to the pair of lamps that gleamed through the darkness, and the fiery horse from whose nostrils went up what seemed puffs of smoke into the frosty air. "At 'ome? He've just got home, and scarce a-bed yet," said the man. "Whatever can you want of master so early in the morning?" Walter had considered it to be night up to this moment; he recognized it as morning with a sigh of excitement. "Mr. Rochford must be called immediately," he said, his thoughts tugging at him all the time, saying, Why? Why can't you let him alone? Is it your business to force him to get up, to produce his papers, to drive half a dozen miles to get up, to produce his papers, to drive half a dozen miles in the chill of the morning? But Walter, though he heard all this, took no notice. 'Let him know that I am waiting. Sir Walter Penton is very ill. He must come at once," he said. He jumped down from the cart, and began to pace rapidly up and down to restore the circulation to his half-frozen limbs, while the groom covered the horse with a cloth and eased the harness. There was no time to put the animal up, to go in-doors and wait. As Walter took his sharp walk up and down, the opposing force in his mind had a time to itself of inaction and silence, and heaped argument upon argument before him. What! hurry like this, drag every one that was wanted from their rest, dis-turb the whole sleeping world with the clamor of his appeal in order to undo himself! Was this his duty, anyhow that it could be considered? Was it his duty to undo himself? More than ever, now he had seen it, Penton had become the hope of his life, the object of all his wishes; and was it in order to divest himself of the last possibility of being heir of Penton, though this was what Sir Walter had called him, that he was here?

The chill became keener than ever; a sharp air, blighting everything it touched, blew in his face and chilled him to the bone. It was the first breath of the dreary dawning, the dismal rising of a dull day. A faint stir became perceptible in the house, very faint, a light flashed at a window, there was a far-off sound of a voice, the movement of some one coming down-stairs. Then a voice called out, "What is it, Penton? Is it possible I'm wanted? I can't believe the man. What do you want with me?" And Rochford, shivering, half dressed, with a candle in his hand, appeared at a side door, close to which Walter was

performing his march. "You can't have come all this way for nothing," he cried, "but it's not an hour since I came home. It doesn't seem possible. Am I wanted cer-

tainly?"

Now was the time. The reasonings within tore Walter as if they had got hold of his heart-strings. Why should he be so obstinate, forcing on what would be his own ruin? It would be all his doing, the hurry-scurry through the night, the insistance, calling up this man, who yawned and gazed at him with a speechless entreaty to be let off, and his father, who probably now was waiting for him by the cross-roads in the dark, chilled too to the heart. It would be all his own officiousness, offering himself to go, forcing the others. These harpies were tearing at him all the time he was saying aloud, his own voice sounding strange and far off in his ears, "Sir Walter has been taken very ill; he wants you at once. Mrs. Russell Penton sent me. You are to bring all the papers, and we are to pick up my father on the way." He said all this as steadily as if there was 'not another sentiment in his mind. What," said Rochford, "the papers, and your father! Come in, at least; it will take me some time to find them. Come in, though I fear there's no fire anywhere."

"I want no fire, only make haste," said Walter, "we may be too late." Too late! yes, it was possible even now to be too late, but no longer likely. Now be still, oh, reasoning soul, keep silence, for there is no remedy—the thing is done, and yet it was still possible that it might not

be done in time.

Rochford was a long time getting himself and his papers together; so long that the blackness became faintly gray, and objects grew slowly visible, rising noiselessly out of the night. The young man went up and down, up and down mechanically. He had jumped down to recover himself of the numbness of his long drive, but numbness seemed to have taken possession of him body and soul. His mind had fallen into a sort of sullen calm. He asked himself whether he should take the trouble to accompany them back at all. Rochford and his father were all that were necessary. He was not wanted. He thought he would walk home, getting a little warmth into him, following the clamor of the cart, but so far behind that all the echoes would die out, and leave him in the silence, making his way home. Not to

Penton, where for a moment he had dreamed a glorious dream, and heard himself called old Sir Walter's heir, but home to the Hook, where he had been born, where to all appearance he would die, where he could steal to his own bed in the morning gray, and sleep and sleep, and forget it all. But now again another revolution took place in him; he no longer wanted to sleep, all his faculties were wide awake, and life ablaze in him as if he never could sleep again. When Rochford at last came out with his bag, Walter acted as if there had never been a question in his mind, as he had acted all along; he sprung up to his place without a word, gathered the reins out of the groom's hand, and took the road again, reckless, at the hottest pace. The horse was still fresh, rested yet fretted by the delay, and easily urged to speed. Walter did not know how to drive, he had no experience of anything more spirited than the pony-of-all-work at home, and it was solely by the light of nature, and a determination to get forward, that he was guided. The groom had not ventured to say anything, but Rochford was afraid, and remonstrated seriously. "You can't go downhill at this pace, you will bring the horse down, or perhaps break our necks," he said. "I'll not be too late," said Walter, "that is the only thing; we must be there in time." At the cross-roads Mr. Penton, shivering, was pulled up on the cart almost without stopping, and they dashed on once more. The landscape revealed itself little by little, rising on all sides in gray mist, in vague ghostly clearness—the skeleton trees, the solid mass of the houses, the long clear ribbon of the river lighting the plain. And then Penton-Penton rising dark and square with its irregular outline against the clouds. There were lights in many of the windows, though every moment the light grew clearer. Dawn had come, the darkness was fleeing away; had life gone with it? as it is said happens so often. Walter, dashing in at the open gates, urging the horse up the avenue, did not ask himself this question. He felt a conviction, which was bitter at his heart, that he had completed his mission successfully, and that they had come in time. The control of the control suntant comed alow bluewed the secure of the bottom ton accompanies

CHAPTER XXII.

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A DEATH-BED.

SIR WALTER lay in his luxurious bed, where everything was arranged with the perfection of comfort, warmth, softness, lightness, all that wealth could procure to smooth the downward path. He was not in pain. Even the restlessness which is worse than pain, which so often makes the last hours of life miserable, an agony to the watchers, perhaps less so to the sufferer, had not come to this old man. He lay quite still, with eyes shining unnaturally bright from amid the curves and puckers of his heavy old eyelids, with a half smile on his face, and the air of deliverance from all care which some dying people have. He was dying not of illness, but because suddenly the supplies of life had failed, the golden cord had broken, its strands were dropping asunder. The wheels were soon to stand still, but for the moment that condition of suspense did not seem to be painful. There was fever in his eyes which threw a certain glamour over everything about. He had asked that the candles might be lighted, that the room should be made bright, and had called his daughter to his side. Perhaps it was only her own anxiety which had made her suppose that he had asked for Rochford and the papers. At all events, if he had done so, he did so no more. He held her hand, or rather she held his as she stood by him, and he lightly patted it with the other of his large, soft, feeble hands.

"You are looking beautiful to-night—as I used to see you-not as you have been of late. Alicia, you are looking

like a queen to-night."

"Oh, father, dear father, my beauty is all in your eyes."
"Perhaps, more or less," he said; "I have fever in my eyes, and that gives a glory. The lights are all like stars, and my child's eyes more than all. You were a beautiful girl, Alicia. I was very proud of you. Nobody but your father ever knew how sweet you were. You were a little proud outside, perhaps a little proud. And then we had so much trouble—together, you and I—"

She said nothing. She had not attained even now to the contemplative calm which could look back upon that trouble mildly. It brought hard heart-beats, convulsive throbs of pain to her bosom still. She had silenced him often by some cry of unsoftened anguish when he had begun so to speak. But as he lay waiting there, as it were in the vestibule of death, saying his last words, she could silence him no more.

"Something has occurred to-night," he said, "that has brought it all back. What was it, Alicia? Perhaps your ball; the dancing—we've not danced here for long enough—or the music. Music is a thing that is full of associations; it brings things back. Was there anything more? Yes, I think there must have been something more."

She stood looking at him with dumb inexpressive eyes. She could not, would not say what it was besides, not even now at the last moment, at the supreme moment. All the opposition of her nature was in this. Love and pride and sorrow and the bitter sense of disappointment and loss, all joined together. She met his searching glance, though it was pathetic in its inquiry, with blank unresponsive eyes. And after awhile in his feebleness he gave up the inquiry.

"We have gone through a great deal together, you and I—ah, that is so—only sometimes I think there was a great deal of pride in it, my dear. My two poor boys—poor boys! I might be hard on them sometimes. There was the disappointment and the humiliation. God would be kinder to them. He's the real father, you know. I feel it by myself. Many and many a time in these long years my heart has yearned over them. Oh, poor boys, poor silly boys! had they but known, at least in this their day—Alicia! how could you and I standing outside know what was passing between God and them when they lay—as I am lying now?"

"Oh, father, father!" she cried, with an anguish in her voice.

"It is you that are standing outside now, Alicia, alone, poor girl; and you don't know what's passing between God and me. A great deal that I never could have thought of—like friends, like friends! I feel easy about the boys, not anxious any longer. After all, you know, they belong to God, too, although they are foolish and weak. Very likely they are doing better—well, now—"

"Oh, father!" she cried, with a keen pang of pain at

what she thought the wandering of his mind. "You for-

get, you forget that they are dead."
Dead!" he repeated, slowly. "I don't forget; but do you know what that means? We never understand anything till we come to it in this life. I'm coming very close, but I don't see-yet-except that it's very different-very different—not at all what we thought."

"Father," she cried, in the tumult of her thoughts;

"oh, tell me something about yourself! Are you happy-

ao you feel-do you remember-"

Alicia Penton had said the prayers and received the faith of Christians all her life, and she wanted, if she could, to recall to the dying man those formulas which seemed fit for his state, to hear him say that he was supported in that dread passage by the consolations of the Gospel. But her lips, unapt to speak upon such subjects, seemed closed, and

she could not find a word to say.

"Happy!" he said, with that mild reflectiveness which seemed to have come with the approaching end. "It is a long, long time since I've been asked that question. If you mean, am I afraid? No, no; I'm not afraid. I'm—among friends. I feel—quite pleased about it all. It will be all right, whatever happens. I don't seem to have anything to do with it. In my life I have always felt that I had everything to do with it, Alicia; and so have you, my dear; it's your fault, too. We were always setting God right. But it's far better this way. I'm an old fellowan old, old fellow-and I wonder if this is what is called second childhood, Alicia; for I could feel," he said, with the touching laugh of weakness, "as if I were being carried away-in some one's arms."

His heavy eyes, that were still bright with fever, closed with a sort of smiling peacefulness, then opened again with a little start. "But it seemed to me just now as if there was something to do-what was there to do?-before I give myself over. I don't want to be disturbed, but if there is something to do- Ah, Gerald, my good fellow, you are

Russell Penton had come in to say that the men who had been sent for so hurriedly, they whose coming was so important, a matter almost of life and death, had arrived. He had entered the room while Sir Walter was speaking, but the hush of peace about the bed had stopped on his lips

the words he had been about to say. He came forward and took the other hand, which his father-in-law, scarcely able to raise it, stretched out toward him faintly with a smile. "I hope you are better, sir," he said, mechanically, bending over the soft helpless hand, and under his breath to his wife, "They are come," he said.

She gave him a look of helplessness and dismay, with an appeal in it. What could be done? Could anything be said of mortal business now? Could they come in with their papers, with their conflict of human interests and passion, to this sanctuary of fading life? And yet again, could Alicia Penton make up her mind to be balked, dis-

appointed, triumphed over in the end?

"Better—is not the word." Sir Walter spoke very slowly, pausing constantly between his broken phrases, his voice very low, but still clear. "I am well—floating away, you know—carried very softly—in some one's arms. You will laugh—at an old fellow. But I don't feel quite clear if I am an old fellow, or perhaps—a child." Then came that fluttering laugh of weakness, full of pathetic pleasure and weeping and well-being. "But," he added, with a deeper drawn, more difficult breath, "you come in quickly. Tell me—before it's late. There is something on my mind—like a shadow—something to do."

Alicia held his hand fast; she did not move, nor look up; her eyes blank, introspective, without any light in them, making no reply to him, fixed on her father's face; but her whole being quivering with a conflict beyond describing, good and evil, the noble and the small, contending over

her, in a struggle which felt like death.

A similar struggle, but slighter and fainter was in her husband's mind; but in him it was not a mortal conflict, only a question which was best. Was it right to permit the old man to float away, as he said, without executing a project which seemed so near to his heart? Because it was not one which pleased Russell Penton, because he would rather that it should fail, he felt himself the more bound to his wife that it should not fail through him.

"It seems almost wicked to disturb you, sir," he said, but I heard that you wanted Rochford; if so, he is here."

Alicia caught her husband by the arm, pressing it almost fiercely with her hand, leaning her trembling weight upon

him. "But not to disturb you, father," she cried, with a

gasp.

Ah!" said Sir Walter, "I remember. What was it? I don't seem to see anything—except those lights like stars shining; and Alicia, Alicia! How beautiful she is looking

—like a girl—to-night."

Her husband gave her a strange glance. She was gripping his arm as if for salvation, clutching it, her breath coming quick; her cheeks with two red spots of anxiety and excitement; her eyes dull, with no expression in the intensity of their passion, fixed on her father's face. The white dressing-gown which she had thrown on when she was called to him was open a little at the throat, and showed the gleam of the diamonds which she had not had time to take off. It was not wonderful that in the old man's eyes, with love and fever together in them, Alicia, in her unusual white, should seem for a moment to have gone back to the dazzle and splendor of youth.

Sir Walter resumed after a moment, as though this little outbreak of tender admiration were an indulgence which he had permitted himself. "My mind's getting very hazy, Gerald—all quite pleasant, the right thing, no trouble in it, but hazy. I remember, and yet I don't remember. If I had but the clew—Rochford?—the young one, not the father. He's gone, like all the rest, and now the young one—reigns in his stead. Bring him, and perhaps I'll remember. You could tell me, you two, but you're afraid to disturb me. What does it matter about disturbing me? a moment—and then—Send for him; perhaps I'll remember."

Alicia would scarcely let her husband go. She looked at him with terror in her eyes. What was she afraid of? When he withdrew his arm from her she dropped down suddenly on her knees by her father's bedside with a low shuddering cry, and hid her face, pressing her cheek upon the old man's hand. The excitement had risen too high. She could bear it no longer. Complicated with all the aching and trouble of the moment, the bursting of this last tie of nature, the dearest and longest companionship of her life, to have that other anxiety, the miserable question of the inheritance, the triumph or sacrifice of her pride, which yet, even amid the solemnity of death, moved her more than any other question on earth—was something intolerable. It was more than she could bear. She sunk down,

partly out of incapacity to support herself, partly that she could not, dared not, meet her father's eyes with their vague and wistful question. "You could tell me, you two." He had seen it, then, in her face, though she had made efforts so determined to banish all sign of comprehension, all answer out of her eyes. And now, if he insisted, how could she refuse to answer him? and if Gerald perceived that the old man had found the necessary clew through her, what would he think of her? That she had preferred her own aggrandizement to her father's peace, that she had prompted him on the very edge of the grave to enrich herself. She could not sustain Sir Walter's look, nor face the emergency without at least that passive protection of her husband's presence, which for the moment was withdrawn. And Alicia trembled for the moment when the strangers would come into this sacred room; the lawyer, and Edward Penton behind him, hesitating, not without feeling (she knew), looking sadly at the death-bed where lay one whom in his early days he had looked up to with familiar kindness. Nobody in the world, not even Gerald, could be so near to him in that moment as Edward Penton. She felt this even while she trembled at the anticipation of his coming. He was nearer than any one living. He would bring in with him the shadows of those two helpless ones disappeared so long out of life. She bethought her in that moment how it had been usual to say "the three boys." Was her mind wandering, too? All these thoughts surged up into her brain in a wild confusion -the old tenderness, the irritation, the bitter jealous grudge at him who had outlived the others, the natural longing toward one who could understand.

Sir Walter was unaffected by any of these thoughts; he felt it all natural—that the grief of his child should overwhelm her, that the sense of parting and loss should be profounder on her side than on his. After various efforts he raised his hand, which was so heavy, which would not obey his will, and laid it tenderly upon her bowed head. "Alicia, my dear, child, don't let it overwhelm you. Who can tell even how small the separation is—as long as it lasts, and it can not last very long. You must not, you must not, my dear, be sorry for me. I tell you—it is all pleasant—sweet. I am not—not at all—sorry for myself. God bless you, my dear. He is so close that when I say

'God bless you' it is as if, my love, He Himself was putting out His hand." and a wind dood to have

"Oh, father! oh, father!" she repeated, and could say

no more was out subset and he should be we should all woods of And he lay with his face turned to her, and his hand feebly smoothing, stroking her bowed head, as if she had been a child. She was a child to him, his young Alicia, looking so beautiful after her ball, in which he had seen her-had he not seen her?-admired of everybody, the fairest, the most stately, with the Penton diamonds glittering at her white throat as they were now. He had her in his mind's eye so distinct, as he had seen her-was it an hour, was it a life-time ago? His breathing began to be disturbed, becoming more difficult, and his thoughts to grow more confused. He talked on, in broken gasps of utterance, more difficult, always more difficult. The fog in his throat—he began to feel it now; but always in flashes saw the lights gleaming, and Alicia in full beauty, with her eyes like the stars, and those other stars, less precious, yet full of luster at her throat. He took no note of outward things, being more and more absorbed—yet with a dullness which softened everything, even the difficulty of the breath—in his own sensations, and in the sweep of the hurrying movement that seemed to be carrying him away, away, into halcyon seas beyond, into repose and smiling. peace. But the woman kneeling under his hand was as much alive to every sound and incident as he was dull to them. Nothing muffled her keen sense, or stilled the flood of thoughts that were pouring through her mind. She heard, her heart leaping to the sound, steps approaching softly, on tiptoe, every noise restrained. She heard a low murmur of voices, then the opening of the door; but she was afraid to lift her head, to startle her father. She dared not look up to see who was there, or how he took the entrance of the new-comers. As for Sir Walter, he was almost beyond disturbance. His hand moved heavily from time to time over her head; sometimes there was a faint tremble when a breath came harder, nothing more. Would he die so? she asked herself, making no sign; was it all sealed up forever, the source of life that had made the light or the darkness of so many other lives. Her own wildly beating heart seemed to stand still, to stop in the tremendous suspense.

"Can you hear me?" said her husband's voice, low and full of emotion. "Rochford is here, sir; do you want him?" no Same betseger eds - tredest do tradust a

He shook his head as he spoke to the two awe-stricken

men behind.
"Eh!" Sir Walter gave a start as if half awakened. "Who did you say?-I think-I must have been asleep. Some one who wants me? They'll excuse a—a sick old man. Some one—who?—Gerald—whom did you say?" "Rochford, sir, whom you wanted to see."

"Rochford! What should I want with Rochford? He's the-lawyer-the lawyer. We have had plenty to do with lawyers in our day. Yes-I think there was something if

I could remember. Alicia, where is Alicia?'

She rose up quickly, all those wild sensations in her stilled by this supreme call. "I am here, father," she said. Her countenance was perfectly colorless, except for two spots of red, of excitement and misery, on her cheeks. Her lips were parched, it was with difficulty she spoke.

"Yes, my love; stand by me till the last. What was it? I feel stronger. I can attend—to business. Tell me, my

child, what it was."

She stood for a moment speechless, turning her face toward them all with a look which was awful in its internal struggle. How was she to say it? How not to say it? Her fate, and the fate of the others, seemed to lie in her hands. It was not too late. His strength fluctuated from moment to moment, yet he could do what was needed still.

"Father," she began, moistening her dry lips, trying to

get the words out of her parched throat.

Sir Walter had opened his heavy eyes. He looked round with a bewildered, half-smiling look. Suddenly he caught sight of Edward Penton, who stood lingering, hesitating, half in sympathy, half in resistance, behind. The dying man gave a little cry of pleasure. "Ah! I remember," he said. Trans to be to the said said and a said the said said to the said said.

CHAPTER XXIII. "THE BOY."

THEY all came round, gathering about his bed, Rochford stooping, drawing the papers out of his bag, Edward Penton approaching closer, looking with a revival in his bosom

of all the forgotten feelings of his youth upon the severed friend, the old protector, the fatherly patron of those days that were no more. To be sundered for years, and then to come again and see the object of the filial, friendly affection of the past, the man round whom your dearest recollections center, lying, whatever chasm may in the meantime have opened between, upon his death-bed-what heart can resist that? Scarcely the most obdurate, the most prejudiced; and Edward Penton was neither one nor the other. He came slowly forward and stood by the bedside, forgetting all about the motive which brought him thither, impatient, so far as he noticed them at all, of the presence of the strangers. He came close, placing himself before Russell Penton, who had no such claim to be there as he. He did not attempt to say anything, but claimed the place, he who was the last one left of the three boys; he whom they had hated rather than loved because he was the survivor, yet who forgot that entirely now, and everything involved in it. He stood by the side of Alicia as he had stood so often. He forgot that there was any question between them. He had been brought, indeed, to sign and settle, but all that floated from him now. Russell Penton stood aside to let him pass, and the lawyer placed himself at the writingtable, which had been brought nearer, within reach of the bed, and where all the papers had been laid out. "Do you think he will be able to understand if I read them?" Rochford said, aside, to Russell Penton; "or shall we try for his signature at once?" Russell Penton made no reply, except by a slight wave of his hand toward the bed. It seemed a profanity that any one should speak or occupy the attention of the group save he who was the center of it. Sir Walter's eyes were open, his interest fully awakened. He watched while the writing-table was drawn forward and put in order. He gave one glance of recognition to Edward. Penton at his bedside, but had not time, it seemed, for greetings, his whole mind being fixed on this thing which he had to do.

"I had almost lost sight of it," he said. "Now, thank God, I remember—while I have the time. It will be—what you call a codicil. Alicia, you always were generous;

you won't grudge it, Alicia?"

"Father!" she cried, bewildered by this preamble; then, in the rapid process of thought trying to believe that it was

some further compensation to Edward which was in her father's mind. "You know," she said, fervently, "that I will grudge nothing that is your pleasure-nothing; you

"Yes, my love—I know; it is not money she would ever grudge. Alicia—no, no; but perhaps honor—or love. Rochford, what I want is about the boy."

"The boy!" Mrs. Russell Penton turned quickly a

searching glance on her father, to which his dim eyes made no response; then looked round with one rapid demand for explanation. She seemed to ask Heaven and earth what he meant. Could it be this? Could this be all?"

"The boy!" Rochford echoed, with amazement; "what boy, sir?" faltering. "There was nothing about any boy;" and he too gave Russell Penton a significant look, meaning that Sir Walter's mind was wandering, and that no settle-

ments could be possible now.

"Gerald, you understand, tell them."

Sir Walter turned his eyes instinctively to the one impartial. "The boy-Edward's boy. Alicia would not see how like he was; but it was very plain to me-and a nice boy. He has the name as well, and he will have Penton. Eh, Penton? What was there about Penton?" The old man paused a moment, trying to raise his heavy brow, his drooping eyelids-and there was a great silence in the room; they all looked at each other, conscious, with something like a sense of guilt, and no one ventured to be the first to speak. It was Alicia, perhaps, who should have done it, but she felt as if her laboring bosom was bound by icy chains, and could not; or the lawyer, who gazed at her mutely, demanding whether he should say anything-what he should say. It was but a moment, breathless, precipitate. Then, as if there had been nothing in it but the break of his difficult breathing, Sir Walter resumed, "He will have Penton, in the course of nature. But we're longlived, it may be a long time first. 'Alicia,' he groped for her with the feeble hand which he could scarcely raise, moving the heavy fingers like a blind man. "Alicia, I want, as long as I can, to do something for the boy."

She had turned half away, her hands had fallen by her side, a blank of something like despair had come over her. Not for Penton! oh, not for Penton; but because he had glided away from her into the valley of darkness, and his mind had gone beyond the reach, beyond the sphere of hers. To feel that as he did so the mind of her father, so long united to hers, as she had believed, in every thought, took another turning, and disclosed other wishes, other sentiments, overwhelmed Alicia with a wild surprise. Death was nothing to that. It made heaven and earth reel to her with the greatness of the astonishment. But that too was but for a moment. She turned round, it seemed to the spectators instantly, though to herself after a pause which was tragical in its passion, and answered the feeble groping of the blind hand by clasping it in both of hers. Then she had to summon her voice from the depths, to break the chains of ice. "Whatever," she said, "father, whatever you wish."

There was something like reviving life; there was reconciliation, reunion, in the way his dull fingers closed upon hers. Had a shadow of doubt come over the dying mind? He breathed a long sobbing sigh, which was half satisfaction and half the prolonged effort of dying. "To do some-

thing," he murmured, "for the boy."

Here Rochford broke in, becoming accustomed to the solemnity of the scene, and recovering the instinct of business and a sense of the necessity of completing what he had in hand. "But," he said, "this is not the business for which I was summoned. Everything is ready; there are

only the deeds to sign; there is only the signature-'

Alicia gave him a warning look to stop him, and Russell Penton put forth his hand with an impressive "hush!" Perhaps it was the new voice that caught the attention of Sir Walter. He opened his eyes again, but half, showing only a sightless whiteness under the heavy lids. "Eh?" he said, "was some one speaking? I can't hear any more. Alicia—what? what?—was it—about the boy—"

"It was—our own business, father: but not to trouble you. It shall trouble you," she said firmly, but with an indescribable tone that said much, "no more, no more."

A faint grateful smile came upon his face, the faintest, almost imperceptible, pressure of her hands. And then in a moment sleep came over the aged pilgrim so near the end of his career. They all stood in the silence of awe about the bed, watching, unable to believe that it was only sleep and not death. The one was almost more awful than the other would have been. That the common repose which

refreshes all living things should come in the middle of dying seemed almost an unnatural break. Even love itself in such circumstances can not endure delays, and would fain push the bark of the soul out into the eternal sea. Mrs. Russell Penton sat down by the bed, holding her father's hand still in hers. And for some time her cousin stood beside her, silent, absorbed, standing mechanically with his eyes fixed upon the still face on the pillow. Edward Penton was scarcely sensible of what was passing round him. It seemed all to be going on in a dream, in which he saw and heard plainly enough, yet attached little meaning to anything that occurred. He had come to conclude his bargain, touched, deeply touched by the condition of his old relation, his former protector and friend, but yet more occupied by the importance of the event to himself and to his wife and children, who were nearer to him still. But when he had entered the sick-room he had stepped into a dream—everything had changed. His business had sunk away, as it were, into the chaos of abortive projects. Nothing was required of him except to stand and look on reverently while the shadows of death gathered. His heart was deeply touched; it had seemed to him natural, only natural and fitting that he should stand by Alicia at this solemn moment. He was the nearest of her kin; he was the oldest of her friends; he had loved her in his time; even now there were no two people in the world who had the same hold upon his imagination and his memories as these two, the father and daughter. It was his right to be here more than Russell Penton's; nearer than any one else living he had a right to stand by her, to give her the support of an affection as old and almost as natural as her own. Though he had not seen Sir Walter for years, there was no one so nearly Sir Walter's son as he. What was said about the boy perplexed him, almost made him impatient. The boy-what boy? He did not understand. He himself was the last of the three boys, the survivor, whose surviving had seemed a wound and injury, but which yet gave him rights which no one in the world, no one else could ever have as he.

The entrance of the doctor, who came in softly, and looked, with the gravity which dying commands from all, upon the sleeper, disturbed the group. The gentlemen withdrew to leave him free for his examination, and for the

whispered directions which were necessary, carrying away the writing-table with all its useless arrangements. When he left the bedside they surrounded him with questions. Was it possible that there might be a period of revived strength? was it likely that he could attend to business still? Important business remained to be settled. The doctor shook his head. He gave them certain low-toned explanations which for the moment seemed to make everything clear, but in reality left them as little informed as ever; and, on the other hand, gave them a little lecture upon the folly of postponing business to such a moment. "A man of Sir Walter's age, and in his state of health, could never be calculated upon," he said. "I hope the business is not vital. To leave wills or settlements to the last is the greatest folly." A statement of this kind, superfluous and absolute, is at all times so much easier to give than a little enlightment upon the immediate case. But how could the doctor tell any more than any spectator whether the old man would wake from that sleep to an interval of clearness and consciousness, or whether he would dream away the few remaining moments that lay between him and the end of his career?

And then stillness fell upon them all, a period of utter quiet, of that waiting for death which is intolerable to the living. Alicia sat by her father's bedside alone, still holding his hand, watching his sleep, feeling nothing but the arrest of all things, the suspension of thought itself. The three men had withdrawn to the anteroom, where they waited for any movement or call. Rochford, who had no reason for any profounder feeling than that of respectful sympathy, drew near the fire in the shivering chill of the grav winter morning, and after awhile dozed and dreamed of the ball, with all its music and lights. Russell Penton seated himself close to the door, where he could see his wife at her father's bedside. Her head was turned from him, but yet it was giving her the support of his presence to be there. Edward Penton was the only one who could not rest. He went to the window and gazed out blankly upon the cold misty morning light, now as full day as it was likely to be. All was whiteness upon the wide stretch of the landscape, the river milky and turbid under the featureless whitish vapor that covered the sky, mist hanging about the ghostly trees, cold, damp, and penetrating, steal-

ing to the heart; within the fire burned dimly, the lights had been put out, though from the door of Sir Waiter's room still came a stream of candle-light shining unnaturally in the gray pale suffusion of the day. Mr. Penton wandered from the window to the fire, then stood behind Russell Penton's chair, and gazed into the hushed room where one lay dying and the other watching. He thought nothing about his business which was so strange; he had not yet awakened to the sense of those wandering injunctions about the boy. He was troubled, sad, confused in his soul, only conscious of the close neighborhood of death, and that all somehow had fallen back into a kind of chaos out of which there seemed no apparent way.

None of them knew how long the time was. It was endless, intolerable, an awful pause in their own living, in which everything was arrested, even thought. For what could the thoughts do whirling vainly about a subject on which there could be no enlightenment, beating as it were against a blank wall all round and round? In reality it was not quite an hour when Alicia rose from the bedside and made a sign to her husband. Sir Walter's voice broke again into the silence, eager, quick, startling, "Eh! eh!

What—what is it? What's to do? What's to do?"

They hurried in one after another, young Rochford waking up with the air of the last waltz still in his ear, hastening to the table, where all the papers were still laid out. Sir Walter had struggled up upon his bed and sat gazing out upon them, holding his daughter fast, who had hastily drawn one of his arms over her shoulder by way of support. He looked like an old prophet, with his heavy eyelids raised, his white locks streaming. "What is-to do? What am I to do—before I die?—before I—''

Rochford came forward with his deed, with the pen in his hand. "It is only a signature," he said. "Sir Walter, your signature—here—it is all simple; your name, that is all."

No one moved to help him. He stood holding out the pen, eager as if his own interests were involved, while the rest stood motionless, saying not a word, gazing at this venerable dying figure in that last blaze in the socket. Probably the old eyes, all veiled in whiteness like the mists of the morning, no longer saw anything, though they seemed to look out with solemn intelligence-for Sir Walter made no response; his question had required no answer; his eyes flickered with a movement of the lids, as though taking one other look round, then a smile came over his face. "Alicia—will do it. Alicia—will think of—everything," he murmured, and relapsing as it were upon himself, sunk back, to resume the thread of conscious life no more.

The night was over. The gray day, dim and calm, benumbed with cold, and veiled with mists, yet full in its own occupations and labors, was in possession of earth and sky. Thus one ends while the others go on. There was no new beginning to those who were chiefly concerned. They stopped for a moment, then went on again, life sweeping back with all its requirements to the very edge of the chamber of death. When it was evident that no interval of consciousness was now to be looked for, the watchers went down-stairs and found breakfast, of which indeed they had great need, and talked in subdued tones at first, and on the one sole subject which seemed possible. But presently even this bond was broken, and Russell Penton and Rochford discussed, a little gravely, the weather,

the chances of frost, the state of the country.

Edward Penton did not join in this talk, but he eat his breakfast solemnly, as if it had been a serious duty, saying nothing even to Wat, who had ventured to join the grave party. Wat was more worn out than any of them. He had not been able to rest, and he had the additional fatigue of the drive, not to speak of the wearing effect of the mental struggle to which he was so entirely unaccustomed. He wanted more than anything else to go home. Ally, upstairs in her room, crying out of excitement and sympathy, and longing for her mother, had packed up all the pretty things which had served so little purpose, and was waiting very eagerly for the call to return to the Hook, which it would have been, oh! so much better had they never left. But there had been breakfast for everybody all the same, notwithstanding that the troop of servants were all very anxious, wondering what was to come of it, or rather what was to become of them, a more important question. The only evidence of this great overturn of everybody's habits in the house was that the room in which the dancing had been remained untouched, which was a wonderful departure from the order and regularity of the household. But

everything is to be excused, the housekeeper herself said, in the confusion of a death in the family, though that was a thing for which, considering Sir Walter's great age, they should all have been prepared.

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THE MASTER OF PENTON.

Mr. Penton waited through all the dreary day. He sent the young ones away peremptorily at the earliest opportunity, without throwing any light to them on the state of affairs. 'It would be bad taste, the worst of taste, to have you here at such a time,' he said, but without explaining why. 'Tell your mother I will come back when I can—but not before—' He spoke in ellipses, with phrases too full of meaning to be put into mere words.

"Mab is coming with us, father," said Ally. "We

couldn't leave her here by herself."

"Mab? Who is Mab?" said Mr. Penton, but he looked for no reply. His mind was too much absorbed to consider what they said to him. There seemed so little in their prattle that could not wait for another time. And his mind was full of a hundred questions. By this time, as was natural, the pathetic impression which had been made on him when he stood by his uncle's bedside through those solemn moments, and felt that next to Alicia it was he, of all the world, who had the best right to be there, had died away. Common life had come back to him-his own position, the prospects of his family, what he was to do. He wandered about the house, up and down, with very much the air of a man inspecting it before taking possession, which was what he actually was. But no such consciousness was in his mind. He was overflowing with thought as to what he was to do in the new crisis at which he had arrived. It was a crisis which ought to have been long foreseen, and indeed had been fully entered into in detail many a day. But lately it had been put away from his thoughts, and other possibilities had come in. He had thrust Penton away from him, and allowed himself to feel the power of his wife's arguments, and even to act upon the possible increase of fortune which should be immediate, and bring no responsibility with it. Gradually, and with a

struggle, his mind had been brought to that point. But now all this new condition of affairs was gone, and everything restored to the old basis. The change had come in a moment, so far as he was concerned. He had not anticipated it, had not thought of it, until Sir Walter had suddenly lifted up his dying voice and began to talk of the boy. The boy! he did not realize even now, or scarcely ask himself, who was the boy. The crisis was too great for secondary matters. The real thing to think of was that the new deeds had never been signed nor completed, that no change had been made, that Penton was his, as he had always looked forward to it, not a new fortune unencumbered and free, but Penton with all its burdens, with all its honors, with the old family importance, the position of which he had so often heard, and so often said, that it was one of the best in England. Perhaps at any time he would have been startled and alarmed by the first consciousness of entering into this great inheritance. It was not an advancement that could be thought of lightly as mere getting on in the world. It was like ascending a throne. It was entering on a post rather than on a mere possession. The master of Penton had claims made upon him which were different, he thought, from those of a mere country gentleman. At any time there would have been solemnity in the prospect. But now that he had put it all away from him, and made up his mind to the other, to mere money without any position at all, and had calculated even on withdrawing from the smaller claims of Penton Hook, and setting up in perfect freedom, without any responsibilities, any land or burden of the soil, the awe with which he felt his natural importance come back to him, and all his plans brought to nothing, was great. It was as if Providence had refused to accept that sacrifice which he had not indeed been willing to make, which he had done not for his own pleasure but in deference to what seemed best for the children, more practicable for himself. Providence had made light of all those deliberations, of the mother's arguments, and his own laborious and cloudy attempts to decipher what was best. Whether it was the best or the worst, in a moment God had changed all that, and here he was again at the point from which he had set out-master of Penton, or if not so already, at least in an hour or two to be.

And he looked, to the servants at least, exactly as if he

were taking possession, inspecting his future property. He went from one room to another with eyes that seemed to be investigating everything, though in reality they saw nothing. He walked about the library with his hands in his pockets, looking at all the books, then from the windows over the park, which stretched away down to the river, and in which there was a great deal of wood that might come down. He lingered long over the view: was he marking in his mind the clumps which were thickest, where the trees most wanted cutting—the easiest way to make a little money? Then he went to the dining-room and looked in the same keen way at the plate upon the sideboard, calculating perhaps which were heir-looms and which were not. The butler had his eye upon the probable new master, and drew his own conclusions. And then he went to the drawing-room, where he remained a long time, looking at everything. The butler had a great contempt for the poor relation who was about to come into this great property. "I don't know what he could find to do away with there," that functionary said, and suggested that perhaps the painted roof was the thing that had occupied the speculations of the hungry heir. As it happened, poor Edward Penton's reflections were of the most depressed kind. He asked himself what would she do there-how could she settle herself and her work-basket and the children among those gilded pillars? How were they ever to furnish it? as she had said. His wife after all was a woman of great sense. She knew how difficult it was to adapt one way of living to another, to transpose a household from what was little more than a cottage to what was little less than a palace. But now all her arguments were to come to nothing, and the revolution in his own mind to be set aside. He stood and shivered; for the heating had been neglected on this dismal and exciting day. The heating and everything else had been neglected, and the great room with one feeble fire burning was cold as any deserted place could be. What would she do there with Horry and the rest of the little ones, and her basket with the stockings to darn? Ally had asked herself the same question, but with a sort of awed satisfaction, feeling that this problem would never have to be solved. But now it had come. He strayed at last from the drawing-room through the corridor to the great room sometimes called the music-room, for there was an

organ in it, sometimes called the king's room, since a sacred majesty had once, as at Lady Margaret Bellendean's castle of Tillietudlem, broken his fast there-where the dancing had been. And here it was that the disorganization of the household became apparent. Shutters were still closed and curtains drawn in this room. The pale light struggled in by every crevice, by the folds of the shutters, from the large open chimney, which was filled with flowers. The walls were hung with greenery, garlands of ivy and holly, and feathery bunches of the seed-pods of the clematis. They had been beautiful last night; they were ghastly now, looking as if they had hung there for fifty years. There was something in the neglect, in the deserted place, in the contrast of all that faded decoration with the stillness and desolation of the day, that suited Edward Penton's mood. The rest of the house suggested life and its ordinary occupations, neither sad nor glad, but serious and This was the banquet-hall deserted, which is of all human things the most dismal and suggestive. He walked up and down looking at the banks of flowers, half seen in this curious subdued and broken light. Here it was that the children were dancing, timid strangers, half afraid of it, and of all that was going on, last night: and now today— and the Englishment to still desiral value sow terror visadit

Solemn steps came in at the other end, slowly advancing over the waxed and slippery floor; a solemn figure in black, more grave than ever mourner was, holding its hands folded. "Sir," the butler said, "my mistress has sent me to tell you all is over, about a quarter of an hour ago."

"All over! You mean, my uncle is dead?"

"Sir Walter Penton died, sir, about ten minutes or a quarter of an hour ago, at twenty-five minutes past three."

The butler took out his watch and looked at it with solemnity. "Just twelve minutes since, sir, by the clock, sir."

It cost the man a great effort not to say Sir Edward. Sir Edward it had been for twelve minutes by his watch; but the decorum and a sense that he was himself on the other side restrained him. He paused a minute, waiting for anything that might be said to him, then went back again, his footsteps sounding solemnly all the way upon the uncarpeted floor. Edward Penton sat down on one of the red chairs against the wall which the dancers had used.

A more forlorn picture could not have been made. The day breaking in through the shutters, the drooping decorations, the waxed floor reflecting faintly those lines of pale light, and the man against the wall with his face hidden in his hands. He might have been a ruined spendthrift hearing of the final catastrophe of his fortune, hearing it with metaphorical propriety, amid the relics of feasting and merry-making. But no one would have recognized that picture to represent a man who had just come into his inheritance. To almost and to and and want

He met Rochford going away as he returned to the inhabited parts of the house. "I suppose I need not hesitate to congratulate you," the lawyer said. "Sir Edward, it is not as if the poor old gentleman had been a nearer relation. " what hoting dank wan out to mount

"I don't know what you call near. My uncle was the nearest relation I had of my name; nor why you should call him poor because he has just died."

"I beg your pardon. I meant nothing; it is the ordi-

nary way of talking," said the lawyer, somewhat abashed. "And a very inappropriate one, I think," Edward Penton said. He had relapsed into his usual manner, in which there was always a little suppressed irritation. "I suppose there never was any possibility of producing—" He looked at the bag which Rochford carried.

"It is all so much waste paper," said the young man. "I felt it was so as soon as I saw him; even if we could have got him to sign it would have been of no legal value; he was too far gone. It is curious," he added, "to be so nearly done, and yet not done. I wonder if you are sorry

or pleased?"

Edward Penton made no reply. Rochford's ease and familiarity had seemed natural enough a few days ago, the conceit perhaps of a youngster, nothing more. Now it offended him, he could not tell why. "Do you know," he said, "if my cousin is still there?" He made a movement of his hand toward the room in which Sir Walter lay.

"She has gone to her own room; they have persuaded her to lie down. Mr. Russell Penton is about, I know, if

you want to see him."

Edward Penton went on with another wave of his hand. It was not so much his new position (though as a matter of fact he felt that), but the change in all things, and the con-

fused absorbing sentiment of all that had happened which made his companion disagreeable to him, like a presuming stranger. He himself was as a man in a dream. As he came through those rooms again they too were changed. They were now his. All that foolish idea of having nothing more to do with them was past forever. They were now his. He walked through them with the step of the master, thinking involuntarily how this and that must be changed. The house had become to him a place no longer to be judged on its merits as suitable or unsuitable for the habitation of his family, but one to be adapted, arranged, borne with as being his own. Everything had changed—himself and his surroundings, his future, his place in the world, and the mind with which he approached that place. In the library, to which he returned as the room in which he was most likely to meet some one to whom he could talk, he found Russell Penton, and the two men instinctively shook hands with each other as if they had not met before.

"I hope there was no more suffering," Edward Penton

"None. He never recovered consciousness, but just slept away. No man could have wished a calmer end. He has had a long life, and his dying has been very peaceful. What more could a man desire?"

Edward Penton bowed his head, and they stood together for a moment saying nothing, paying their tribute not only to the life but to the state of affairs that was over. They both felt it, the one as much as the other. To Russell Penton it was, if not actual, at least possible freedom, especially now that the Penton arrangement was over. He grieved for his father-in-law, if not painfully, yet sincerely. He was a venerable figure, a sustaining personality gone out of his life. He had so much less to do and to think of, which was in its way a sorrowful thought. But with that came the secret exhilaration of the consciousness that now perhaps the guidance of his own life would be his own. He would not oppose Alicia nor endeavor to coerce her; that would be the greatest mistake, he felt; but it was likely enough that in her softened state she would of her own accord subdue herself to this. At least, he hoped so, and it spread before him the prospect of a new existence. After they had stood together silent for a minute, Russell Penton spoke.

"I think I ought to say this," he said. "Whatever Alicia may feel, and I fear she will be disappointed, I am myself much more pleased, Penton, that things should be as they are." "I thought that was your feeling all along."

"Yes, they both knew it was; but I have always abstained from saying anything. My first desire was that she should as much as possible have what she liked best. She has well deserved it at my hands."

Edward Penton said nothing on this subject. It was not one in which he could deliver his opinion. "It is a great house," he said, "and a great responsibility for a man with a large family like me."

"You will find it perhaps easier than you think; everything is in very perfect order. Alicia would like me to tell you, Penton, that though it was too late to be added as a codicil, her father's wish is sacred to her, and that it shall

be as he desired about your boy."

"My boy! do you mean Wat? What has he to do with it?" Edward Penton cried, half affrighted. He who had so nearly parted with the birthright himself, he was a little jealous of any interference now: and especially of this, that the feelings of his son should be brought into account in the matter.

"You heard what Sir Walter said. Your son took his fancy very much. He found a resemblance, which I also can see: but Alicia dislikes to hear of it, and so will you,

perhaps."

"A resemblance!" said Edward; and then he thought of Walter Penton, his cousin. If Wat had not been like that unfortunate scapegrace why should he have thought of him now? He said, with energy, "There is no resemblance. They have dwelt so long on the memory of the boys that everything they see seems to have got identified with them. It was not so in their life. My boy Wat is more like- Why, you know, Russell; you remember what a broken-down miserable-"

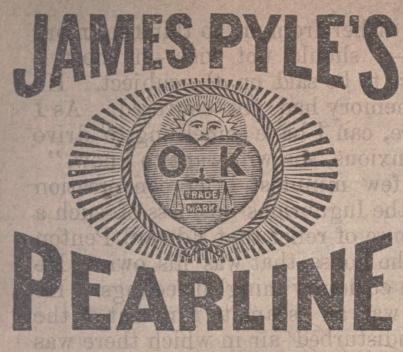
"Hush!" said Russell Penton, lifting his hand. "Let their memory be respected here. Alicia thinks with you; she sees no resemblance: but she will give effect to her father's wishes. Everything he desired is sacred in her

sight."

"I hope she will think no more of it," said Edward Pen-

ton, growing red. "Beg of her from me to think no more of it. I could not have—I should not wish—in short, I should prefer nothing more to be said on the subject. He was an old man. His memory had got confused. As I can not be of any use here, can I have something to drive home? My wife will be anxious, she will want to know."

And then there was a few minutes' brief conversation about the funeral and all the lugubrious business of such a moment. It was with a sense of relief that Edward Penton quitted for the first time the house that was his own. He looked back upon it with curiously mingled feelings. He was glad to get away. It was an escape to turn out of the avenue into the clear undisturbed air in which there was nothing to remind him of the close still atmosphere, the silence, the associations of this fatal place. But yet when he looked back his heart swelled with a sensation of pride. It was his. He had given up thinking of it, avoided looking at it, weaned his heart in every way from that house of his fathers. Never man had tried more honestly than he to give it up, entirely and from the bottom of his heart this thing which was not to be for him. And now, without anything that could be called his doing, lo! it had come back into his hands. It was the doing of Providence, he thought: his heart swelled with a sort of solemn pride. As he went silently along, the landscape took another aspect in his sight. It was the country in which he was to spend all the rest of his life. It was his country, in which he was one of the chief people, a man important to many, known wherever he passed. By degrees a strange elation got into his mind. "Drive quickly, I am in haste to get home," he said to the groom who drove him. "Yes, Sir Edward," said the man, respectfully. He had changed his very name -everything was changed. Then as the red roof of Penton Hook appeared below at the foot of the hill he thought of the anxious faces looking out for him, the young ones with awe in them, thinking of the first death that had crossed their way; his wife wistful, ready to read in his face what had happened. But none of them knowing what had really happened—that Penton was his after all.



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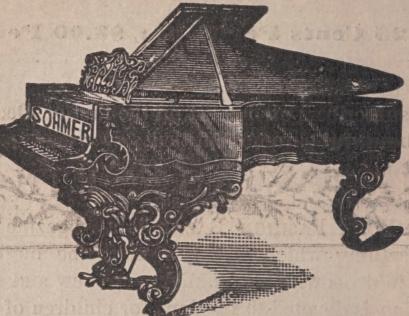
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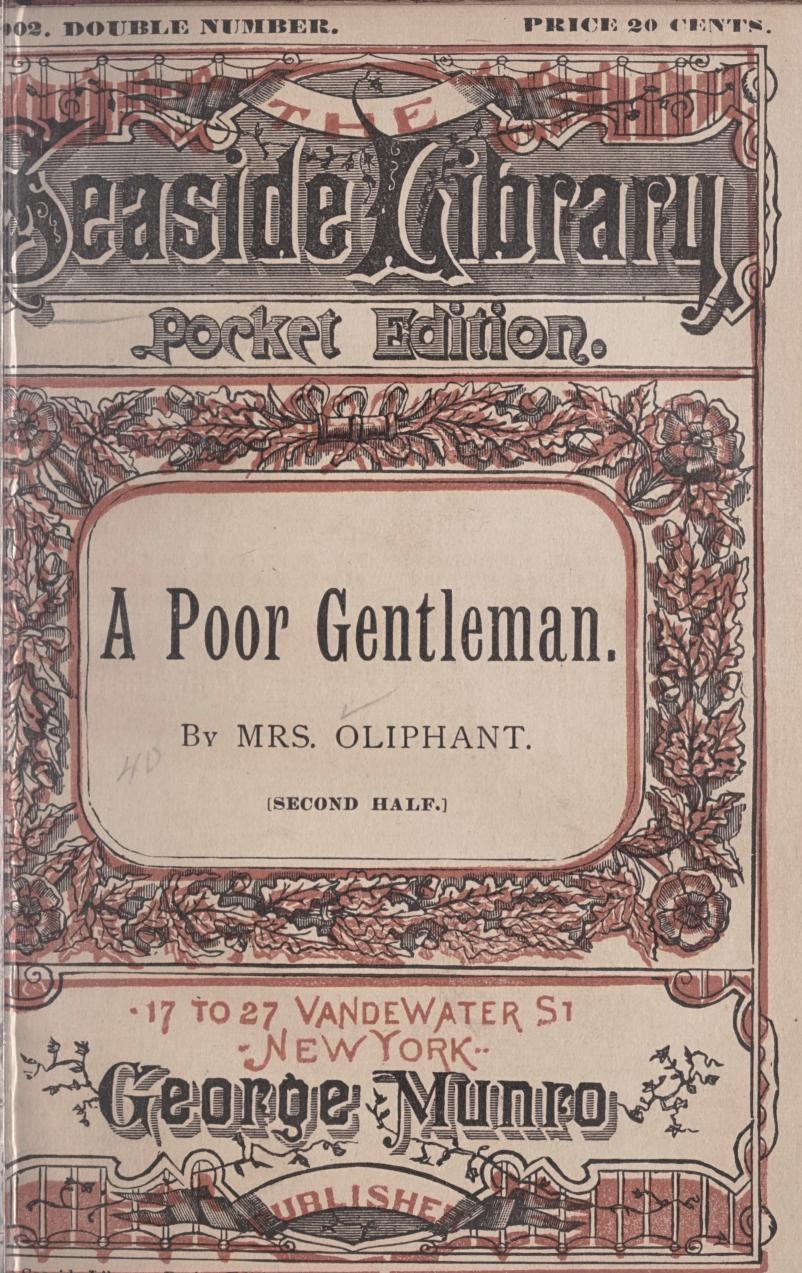
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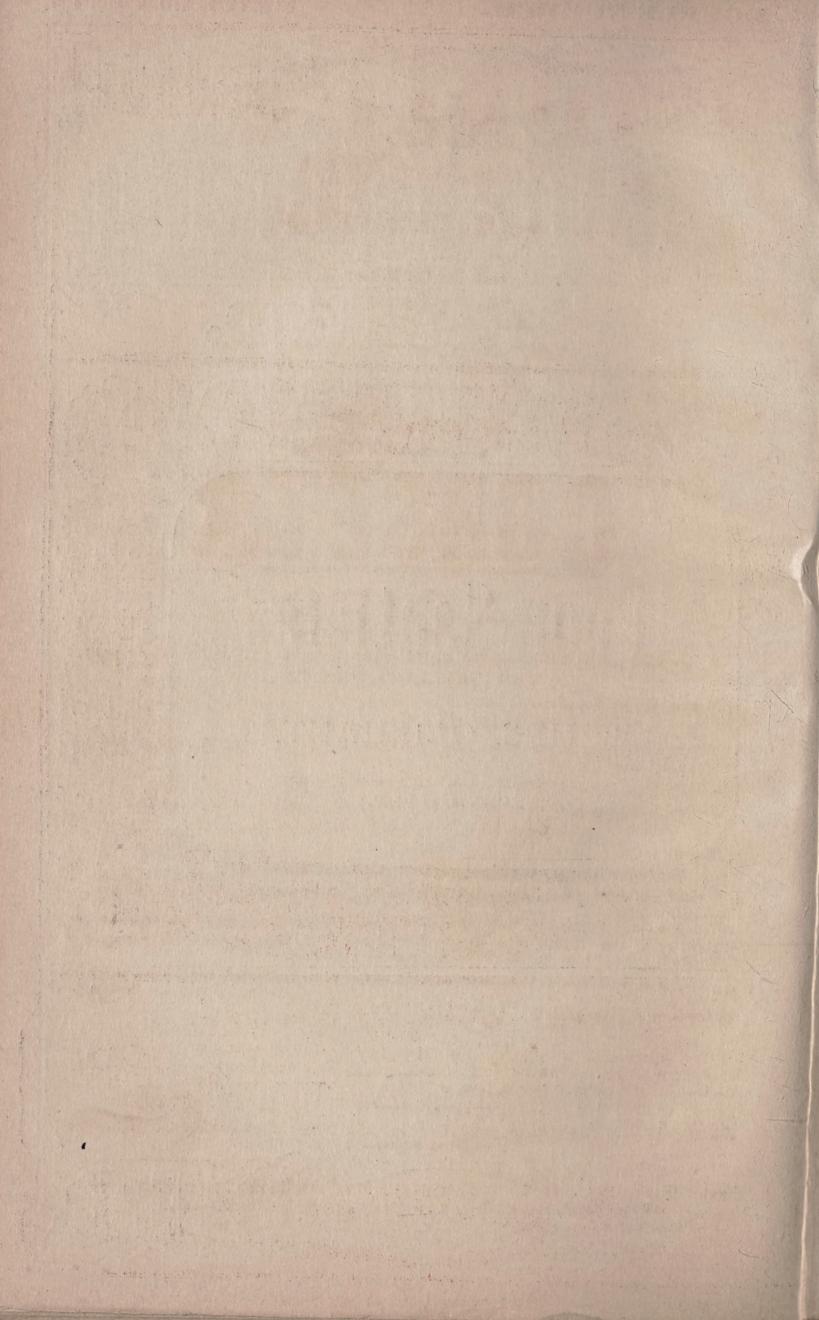
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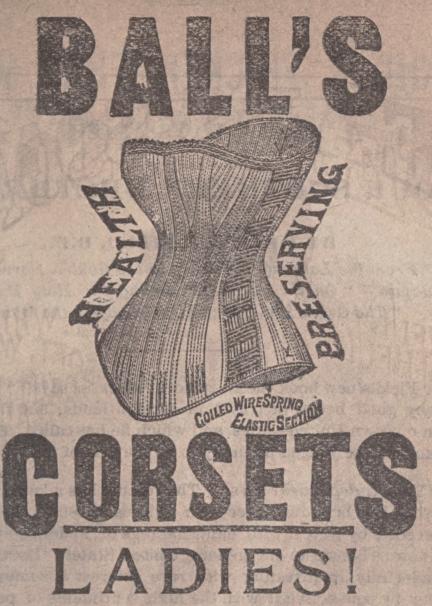
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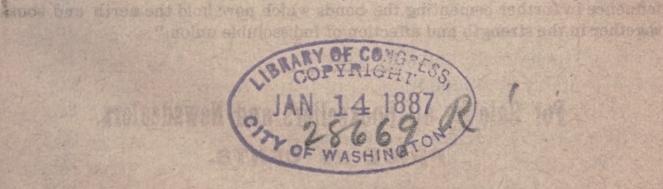
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A POOR GENTLEMAN.

MES OUTPHANTS WORKS

CHAPTER XXV.

AN ENCOUNTER UNFORESEEN.

THE young people drove from Penton to the Hook very silent and overawed, the two girls close together, and Walter opposite to them, looking very heavy and dull, his eyes red with want of sleep and the air of one who has been up all night in every line of him. It is curious what an air of neglect this gives even to the clothes. He felt shabby, out of order, in every way uncomfortable in body and dazed in mind, not feeling that he knew anything about what had happened, nor that he cared to think of that. He almost went to sleep with the closeness and the motion of the carriage, and took no more notice of the presence of the stranger opposite to him than if she had been another sister. It had annoyed him for the first moment, to have her there, but by this time he was quite indifferent to the fact, indifferent to everything, dazed with sleep and agitation and the weakening influence of a struggle past. But there came a moment as they neared home when his senses returned to him with a bound. He was looking vaguely out of the carriage-window seeing nothing, when suddenly, vaguely, there appeared at a distance, going up a road which led away from the main road deep into the quiet of the fields, a solitary figure. It was little more than a speck upon the road, a little shadow almost like that of a child; but it woke Walter fully up in a moment and made his heart beat. He called to the coachman to stop, to the great astonishment of Ally, who thought that something more must have happened in a day so full of fate, and cried

"What is it, Wat, what is the matter?" with anxiety in

her tone.

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"Nothing," he said, opening the door as the horses drew up; "but I should prefer to walk if you don't mind; I think I shall go to sleep altogether if I stay here."

"Shall I come too?" said Ally; but a glance at her companion showed her that this was impracticable.

"'Oh, Wat, don't be long! Mother will want to ask you —she will want to know—"'

"You can tell her as much as I can," he said, taking off his hat in honor of Mab, who looked out with much surprise at this sudden interruption of the drive, which was so dreary and yet so full of novelty and interest. And then the carriage went on.

Ally looking out of the window saw with great perplexity and distress that he turned back along the road. Was he going back to Penton? where was he going? Mab by

her side immediately interposed with a reason.

"Men don't like close carriages," she said; "they always prefer walking coming home from places. I don't

wonder; I should walk if I might."

"We might if we were to go together," said Ally; "we always walk with Walter, Anne and I. He likes it too. Let us-" But then she remembered that Wat had given no sort of invitation. And when she looked out again he had vanished from the road. Where had he gone? This was very startling, not to be explained by anything that oc-curred to Ally. She added quickly, "But it is very cold, and mother will be anxious." And the carriage rolled on without any further interruption through the village and

down the steep and stony way.

Walter could not have restrained himself even had the occasion of his leaving them been now apparent. He felt as if all his life were involved in getting speech of her, in receiving her sympathy and hearing her voice. He had never had such an opportunity before, never met her, scarcely in daylight seen her face, and to see her pursuing the loneliest road, where nobody ever appeared, which led nowhere in particular, where he could have her all to himself without the possibility of being sent away! He hurried along after her, striking across a field and dropping over a low wall, which brought him immediately in front of her as she strolled along. She gave a little cry at sight of him, or rather at the suddenness of the apparition, not distinguishing at first who it was. She was dressed in very dark stuff with some rough fur about her throat and a thick gauze veil shrouding the upper part of her face. The little outline was so slim and pretty that any imperfection

in costume or appearance was lost in the daintiness of the trim form. Indeed, how should Walter have seen any imperfection? She was not like anybody he had ever known. What was different could not but be an added grace.

"You didn't expect to see me," he said, coming up to

her with his hat in his hand.

"How should I? I thought no one knew this path but I.m. It is so quiet. And I saw no one on the road, nothing but a carriage. Ah, I know! You jumped out of the carriage. It was hot and stifling, and there were ladies in it who made you do propriety. I know."
"There was my sister," said Walter, "but I saw you.

That was my reason, and the best one a man could have."

"You are only a boy," she said, shaking her head with a smile. Only her chin and lips were clear of that envious thick veil. The rest of her face was as if behind a mask, but how sweet the mouth was, and the smile that curved it! "And how could you tell it was I? Everybody wears the same sort of thing, tweed frock, and jacket, and—"

"There is nobody like you; it is cruel to ask me how I

knew. If you would only understand-"

"I have heard that sort of thing before, Mr. Penton."

"Yes, I don't doubt every fellow would say it, of course;

but nobody could mean it so much as I."

"That's what you all say; but I don't believe it a bit; only I suppose it amuses you to say it, and it does, a little, amuse me. There are so few things," she said, with a sigh, "to amuse one here."

"That is what I feel," cried the lad; "nothing—we have nothing to keep you here. It is all so humdrum and paltry—a little country place. There is nothing in it good

enough for you."-

She laughed with an air of keen amusement, which in his

present condition slightly jarred upon Walter.

"It is a great deal too good for me," she said, "old Crockford's niece. If anybody speaks to me I courtesy and say, 'Yes, ma'am, it's doing me good, it is indeed, this fine fresh air.''

"I wish," said the boy, "you would drop this, and tell me once for all who you really are. I'm not happy to-day. We are all in great trouble. I wish you would not laugh, but just be serious once."

"Oh, no, sir, I'll not laugh if you don't like it-nor

nothing else as you don't like. I knows my place and how to behave to my betters. I'm Emmy, old Crockford's niece." And she paused in the middle of the road to make him a courtesy. "I've never said nothing else, now 'ave I, sir?"

He looked at her with irritation beyond expression. Could not she see that he was in no humor for jest to-day? And yet he could not but feel that the tone of her imitation was perfect, and that as she said these latter words it was certainly in the voice and with the manner which old Crock-

ford's niece would have employed.

"You don't know," he said, "how you fret me with all that. I thought when I saw you that I'd fly to you and get comforted a little. I don't want to have jokes put upon me just now. All this is very amusing—it's so well done—and it's so droll to think that it's you; but I have been through a great fight this morning," said Walter, with that self-pity which is so warm at his age. He felt his eyes moisten, something was in his throat—he was so sorry for himself; and he almost thought it would be best, after all, to hurry home to his mother, who always understood a man, instead of lingering out here in the cold, even with the most delightful, the most enthralling of women, who would do nothing but laugh. He was in this mood, with his eyes cast down, his head bent, standing still, yet with a sort of movement in his figure as if he would have gone away again, when suddenly a shock, a thrill of sweeter consciousness went through him-and his whole being seemed rapt in delicious softness, comprehension, consolation. She had put her hand suddenly on his arm with a quick, impulsive movement.

"Poor boy!" she said. "You have been in a great

fight? Tell me all about it."

Her voice had changed to the tenderest, coaxing tone.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, in sudden ecstasy, holding close to his side the hand that had stolen within his arm—and for some time could say no more.

" Well?"

"Yes, yes!" cried Walter, "1'll tell you presently. I don't know that I want to tell you at all. I want you to

take an interest in me."

"Oh, if that is all!" she said; then, after a moment, drew her arm away. "If we should meet any one, Mr. Walter Penton, it would not look at all pretty to see you

walking arm in arm with a—girl who lives in the village; a girl whom nobody knows, and, of course, whom everybody thinks ill of; but I can hear you quite well without that. Come, tell me what it is. Did you say a fright or

a fight?"

ight?"
"Both," said Walter. He made various attempts to recover the hand again, but they were all fruitless. The mere touch, however, had somehow-how he could not tellmade things more natural, harmonized all the contrarieties in life, brought back a better state of affairs. The fumes of sleep and fatigue seemed to die away from his brain: the atmosphere grew lighter. It did not occur to him that to disclose the most private affairs of his family to this little stranger was anything extraordinary. He told her all about the bargain between his father and his cousin, and how he himself had been left out, and his consent never asked, though he was the heir; and what had happened this morning-how he had been sent to fetch the parties to this bargain, and the papers, and how he had been tempted to delay or not to go.

"If I had not answered from my room when I heard them, if I had pretended not to hear, if I had only held back, which would have been no sin! Should I have done it? Shouldn't I have done it?" cried Walter, quite una-

ware of the absurdity of his appeal.

The girl listened to all this with her head raised to him in an attitude of attention, but in reality with the most divided interest and a mind full of perplexed impatience. What did she care about his doubts—doubts and difficulties which she could not understand-which did not concern her? Her attention even flagged, though her looks did not. She wanted none of this grave talk: it was only the lighter kind of intercourse which she fully understood.

"Then it was you," she said, seizing the only tangible point in all this outburst, "that I heard thundering past the cottage just before daylight? I couldn't think what

it could be!"

"Did you hear me? I looked up at the windows, but they were all closed and shut up. I wish," cried the young man, "I had known you were awake, I should not have felt so desolate."

"Oh!" she cried, with a little toss of her head, "what good could that have done you?" Then, seeing the cloud come over his face again which had lifted for a moment, "And how has it all ended?" she asked.

"Ended?" He looked at her with surprise. He had not even asked himself that question, or realized that there was a question at all. How could it end but in one way?"

"It is so good of you to tell me," she resumed, "when I am only a stranger and know nothing; but I hope they

won't succeed in cheating you out of your money." My money? oh, there is nothing about money. Money

is not the question."

"Your property I mean; but they couldn't really take it from you, could they? Tell me what you will do when you come into your own. I should like to know."

Walter's heart stood still for the moment. He felt as if he had suddenly come up against a blank world. Was this all she understood or would take notice of, of the struggle he had gone through? Had she no feeling for his moral difficulties or sympathy; or was it perhaps that she thought that struggle too private to be discussed, and thus rebuked him by turning the conversation aside from that too delicate channel? In the shock of feeling himself misunder-stood he paused, bewildered, and seized upon the idea that she understood him too clearly, and checked him with a more exquisite perception of her own. "You think I should not speak of it?" he said. "You think I should not blame—you think— Oh, I understand. A delicate mind would not say a word. But I would not, except to you. It is only to you."

"Now I wonder," said the girl, "why it should be to me? for I don't understand anything about it. And all that you've been telling me about wanting one thing and doing another, I can't tell what you mean—except that I hope it will end very well, and that you will get what you want and be able to live very happy at the end. That's how all the stories end, don't you know. And tell me, when you came into all that fine property, what will you

do?"

She wanted nothing but to bring him back to the badinage which she understood and could play her part in. All this grave talk and discussion of what he ought or ought not to have done embarrassed her. She did not understand it and it stand it, and yet she knew by instinct that to show how

little she understood would be to lose something of her attraction; for though she was scarcely capable of comprehending the ideal woman whom the youth supposed he had found in her, yet she divined that it was not herself but an imaginary being who was so sweet in Walter's eyes. Perhaps it was even with a dull pang and sense of her inferiority that she discovered this; but she could not make herself other than she was. At any risk she had to regain that lighter tone which was alone possible to her. She put up her veil a little and looked at him with a sort of laughing provocation in her eyes. It was a vulgar version of the "Come, woo me," of the most delightful of heroines. She could understand him or any man on that ground. She knew how to reply, to elude, or to lead on; but in other regions she was not so well prepared; she preferred to lead the conversation back to herself and him. "I do not suppose," he said, in a subdued tone, "that

there will be any property to come in to."

"Oh, that is nonsense," she said, putting this denial lightly away; "of course there will be property some time or other. And when you come into your fortune, tell me,

what shall you do?"

Walter gave up with a sigh his hope of receiving support and consolation; but even now he was not able to follow her lead. "I suppose," he said, very uncheerfully, "I shall have to go to Oxford. That's the only thing I shall be allowed to do."

"Oh, to Oxford!" she cried, with disdain.

"I don't know that I wish it, only it's the right thing to do, I suppose," said Walter, with another sigh. "Don't

you think so?"

"I think so? No, indeed! If I were you—oh, if I were you! That's what I should like to be, a young gentleman with plenty of money and able to do whatever I pleased."

"Oh," he said, with a shudder, "don't say so; you who are so much finer a thing—so much—don't you know—it is a sort of sacrilege to talk so."

At this she laughed with frank contempt. nonsense," she said; "but I should not go to Oxford. I'd go into the Guards. It is they that have the best of it; almost always in London, and going everywhere. I should not marry, not for years and years!"

" Marry!" cried Walter, and blushed, which it did not

occur to his companion to do.

"No, I should not marry," said the girl; "I should have my fun, that is, if I were a gentleman. I should make the money go; I should go in for horses and all sorts of things. I should just go to the other extremity and do everything the reverse of what I have to do now. That's because I can do so little now. Come, tell me, Mr. Pen-

ton, what should you do?"

Walter was much discomposed by this inquiry. He was disturbed altogether by the turn the conversation had taken. It was not at all what he had intended. He felt baffled and put aside out of the way; but yet there was an attraction in it, and in the arch look which was in her eyes. He felt the challenge and it moved him, notwithstanding that in his heart he was deeply disappointed that she had thrown back his confidences and not allowed herself to be drawn into his thoughts. He half understood, too, whither she wanted to lead him-into those encounters of wit in which she had so easily the mastery, in which he was so serious, pleading for her grace, and she so capricious, so full of mystery, holding him at bay. But he could not all at once, after all the experiences of the morning, begin to laugh again.

"I am stupid to-day," he said. "I can't think of fort-une or anything else. I dare say I should do just the

reverse of what you say."

"What! marry?" she said. "Oh, silly! You should

not think of that for years."

"I should do more than think of it," cried Walter, "if I—if you—if there was any chance—". The boy blushed again, half with the shy emotion of his years, the sudden leaping of his blood toward future wonders unknown. And then he stopped short, breathing hard. "You tempt me to say things only to mock me," he said. "You think it is all fun; but I am in earnest, deep in earnest, and I mean what I_''

He stopped suddenly, the words cut short on his lips. They had turned a corner of the road, and close to them, so close that Walter stumbled over the stones on which he was seated, slowly chipping away with his hammer, was old Crockford, with ruddy old face, and white hair, and

his red comforter twisted about his neck.

"Is that you, baggage?" said the old man, who saw the girl first as they came round the corner. "What mischief are ye after now? I never see one like you for mischief. Why can't ye let the lads alone? Why, Master Walter!" he cried, in consternation, letting the hammer fall out of his hand.

"Yes, Crockford. What's the matter? Do you think I am a ghost?" said Walter, in some confusion. It was cowardly, it was miserable, it was the smallest thing in the world. Was he ashamed to be seen with her, she who was (he said to himself) the most perfect creature, the sweetest and fairest? No, it could not be that; it was only what every young man feels when a vulgar eye spies upon his most sacred feelings. But he grew very red, looking the old stone-breaker, the road-mender, humblest of all functionaries, in the face as he spoke.

"Ghost!" said old Crockford, "a deal worse than that. A ghost could do me no harm. I don't believe in 'em. But the likes of hur, that's another pair o' shoes. I know'd as she'd get me into trouble the moment I set eyes on her. Be off with you home, and let the young gentleman alone. You've made him think you're a lady, I shouldn't wonder. And if Mr. Penton found out he'd put me out of my cottage. Don't give me none of your

sauce, but run home."

"I have done no harm," said the girl. "Mr. Penton couldn't put you out of your cottage because I took a walk. And you can send me away when you please. You know

I'm not afraid of that."

"I know you're always up to mischief," said the old man, "and that if it isn't one it's another. I've had enough of you. There's good and there's bad of women just like other creatures, but for making mischief there's naught like them, neither beasts nor man. Be off with you home."

"Crockford, you forget yourself. That's not a way to speak to a—to a young lady," cried Walter, wavering between boyish shame and boyish passion. "And as for my father—"

"A young lady; that's all you know! Do you know

who she is, Mr. Walter?" cried the old man.

"I am old Crockford's niece," said the girl, "and I know my place. I've never given myself out for any more

than I am; now have I, sir? Thank you for walking up the hill with me, and talking so kind. But it's time I was going home. He's quite right, is the old man; and my duty to you, sir, and good-day; and I hope you will come into your fortune all the same."

How was it that she turned, standing before him there in the road in all her prettiness and cleverness, into Crockford's niece, with the diction and the air proper to her "place," was what Walter could not tell. She cast him a glance as she turned round which transfixed him in the midst of his wonder and trouble, then turned and took the short cut across the field, running, getting over the stile like a bird. Which was she, one or the other? Walter stood and gazed stupidly after her, not knowing what to think or say.

CHAPTER XXVI. TOB brid of the land of the

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THE NEW STATE OF AFFAIRS.

WHEN Mr. Penton in the dog-cart was heard coming down the steep path to the open gates there was a universal rush to door and window to receive him. The delay in his coming had held the household in a high state of tension, which the arrival of the carriage with Ally and the young visitor increased. The girls could give no information except that Sir Walter was very ill, and that Mr. Russell Penton himself had put them into the carriage and sanctioned their coming away. Ally took her mother anxiously aside to explain.

"I didn't know what to do. She is Mr. Russell Penton's niece; she has no father or mother. She wanted to come, and he seemed to want her to come. Oh, I hope I

haven't done wrong! I couldn't tell what to do."

"Of course, there is the spare room," said Mrs. Penton, but she was not delighted by the appearance of the stranger. "Tell Martha to light a fire in the spare room. But you must amuse her yourselves, you and Anne; your father must not be troubled with a visitor in the house."

"Oh, she will not be like a visitor, she will be like one

of ourselves," said Ally.

The father, however, observed the little fair curled head

at the drawing-room window as he drove up, and it annoyed him. A stranger among them was like a spy at such a moment. The girls were at the window, and Walter, newly returned, had been standing at the gate, and Mrs. Penton was at the door. He jumped down, scarcely noticing the anxious look of inquiry with which she met him, and stopped on the step to take a sovereign from his waistcoatpocket, which he handed to the groom who had driven him. "Thank you, Sir Edward," said the man, touching his

hat with great obsequiousness.

"Sir Edward!" and a sovereign! The two things to-gether set Mrs. Penton's heart beating as it scarcely ever had beat before. She did not understand it for the moment. "Sir Edward:" and a sovereign! This perhaps

was the most impressive incident of all.

Then he took her by the arm without a word of explanation. "Come with me into the book-room, Anne." He had not a word even for little Molly, who came fluttering like a little bird across the hall and embraced his leg, and cried, "Fader, fader!" in that little sweet twitter of a

voice which was generally music to his ears.

"Take her away," was all he said, with a hasty pat of her little shining head. His face was as grave as if the profoundest trouble had come upon him, and wore that vague air of resentment which was natural to him. Fate or Fortune or Providence, however you like to call it, had been doing something to Edward Penton again. As a matter of course, it was always doing something to him-crossing his plans, setting them all wrong, paying no attention to his feelings. There was no conscious profanity in this thought, nor did the good man even suppose that he was arraigning the Supreme Disposer of all events. He felt this sincerely, with a sense of injury which was half comic, half tragic. Mrs. Penton was used to it, and used to being upbraided for it, as if she had somehow a secret influence, and if she pleased might have arrested the decisions of fate. "Well, Edward?" she said, breathless, as he closed the

book-room door.

"Well," he replied. The fire was low, and he took up the poker violently in the first place and poked and raked till he made an end of it altogether. "I think," he said, "after being out all the morning, I might at least find a decent fire." "I'll make it up in a moment, Edward. A little wood

will make it all right."

"A little wood! and you'll have to ring the bell for it, and have half a dozen people running and the whole house disturbed, just when I have so much to say to you! No, better freeze than that." He turned his back to the fire, which, after all, was not quite without warmth, and added, after a moment, not looking at her, contracting his brows, and with a sort of belligerent shiver to let her see that he was cold, and that it was her fault. "My uncle is dead."

"Is it all over, Edward? I fancied that it must be soon;" and then she added, with a little timidity, "were you in

time?"

"In time! I was there for hours." He knew very well what she meant, but it was a sort of pleasure to him to pro-long the suspense. "Of course," he said, slowly, "he could not be expected to recover at his age. Alicia should have known better than to have had -- dances and things at his age."

"Dances! I have had no time to speak to Ally. I didn't know; oh, how dreadful, Edward, and the old man

"The old man wasn't dying then," he said, pettishly. "How were they to suppose he was going to die? He has often been a great deal worse. He was an old man who looked as if he might have lived forever."

After this his wife made no remark, but furtively-her housewifely instincts not permitting her to see it go out be-fore her eyes—stooped to the coal-box standing by to put

something on the fire.

"Let it alone!" he said, angrily. "At such a moment to be poking among the coals! Do you know what has happened? Can't you realize it a little? Here we have Penton on our hands—Penton! That place to be furnished, fitted out, and lived in! How are we to do it? I am in such a perplexity I think as never man was. And instead of helping me, all your thoughts are taken up with mending the fire!"

Mrs. Penton sat down suddenly in the first chair. She put her hand upon her heart, which had begun to jump.
"Then you were not in time? Oh, I thought so from the

first. To go on wasting day after day, and he such an old

man!"

And in the extreme excitement of the moment she began to cry a little, holding her hand upon her fluttering heart: "It was what I always feared: when there is a thing that is troublesome and difficult, that is always the thing that

happens," she cried.

Her husband did not make any immediate reply. wheeled round in his turn and took up the poker, but presently threw it down again. "It is no use making a fuss over that now. It's that fellow Rochfort's fault. By the way," he said, turning round again sharply, "mind, Annie, I won't have that young fellow coming here so much. It might not have mattered before, but now it's out of character—entirely out of character. Mind what I

Mrs. Penton took no notice of this. She went on with a little murmur of her own: "No, it is of no use making a fuss. We can't undo it now. To think it might have been settled yesterday, or any day! and now it never can be settled whatever we may do."

"I don't know what you mean by settled," he said, hastily; "nothing can be more settled; it is as clear as daylight: not that there could be any doubt at any time.

thing we've got to think of is what we are to do."

"With all the children," said Mrs. Penton, "and that great empty house, and no ready money or anything. Oh, Edward, how can I tell what we are to do? It has been before me for years. And then I thought when your cousin spoke that all was going to be right."

"There's no use speaking of that now."

"No, I don't suppose there's any use. Still, when one thinks--which of course I can't help doing; when your cousin came I thought it was all right. Though you never would listen to me, I knew that you would listen to her. And now here it is again just as if that had never been!"

It was, perhaps, not generous of Mrs. Penton to indulge in these regrets, but it was expecting from her something more than humanity is capable of, to suppose that she would instantly turn into a consoler, and forget that she had ever prophesied woe. That is very well for an ideal heroine, a sweet young wife who is of the order of the embodied angel. But Mrs. Penton was the mother of a large family, and she had other things to think of than merely keeping her husband in a tranquillity which perhaps he did

not desire. When there are so many interests involved, it is not easy for a woman to behave in this angelic way. Perhaps her husband did not expect it from her. He stood leaning his back upon the mantel-piece with a countenance which had relapsed into its usual half-resentful quiet. He was not angry nor surprised, nor did he look as if he were paying much attention. It gave him a little time to collect his own thoughts while she got her little plaint and irrestrainable reflections over. Sympathy is in this as much as in other more demonstrative ways. If she had got over it in a moment without any expression of feeling, he would probably have been shocked, and felt that nothing mattered to her; but he got calm, while she, too, had her little grumble and complaint against fate.

"The thing," he said, "now, is to think what we must do. I sha'n't hurry the Russell Pentons; they can take their time; and in the meantime we must look about us. The thing is there will be no rents coming in till Lady-day, and it's only Christmas. I never thought I should have seen it in this light. To succeed to Penton seemed always the thing to look forward to. It is you that have put it in this light."

"What other light could I put it in, Edward? Penton is very different from this, and we have never been much at our ease here. I was always frightened for what would happen when you began to realize—But, dear me," she added, "what is the use of talking? We must just make the best of it. Nothing is quite so bad as it seems likely to be. With prudence and taking care, perhaps, after all, we may do—"

"Do!" he said, "to go to Penton, the great house of the family, and to be the head of the family, and to have nothing better before one than a hope that we shall be able to do-'' And then there was a pause between this careful and troubled pair; and of all things in the world, any stranger who had seen them, would have imagined last of all that they had succeeded to a great inheritance, and that the man at least had attained to what had been his hope and dream for years.

"Well," she said at last, "I can't do you any good, Edward, and the bell for dinner will be ringing directly. You must have had an agitating morning, and I dare say eat no breakfast, and you will be the better for your dinner. I suppose we ought to draw down all the blinds."

"Why should you draw down the blinds? There is not

too much light."

"I should not like," said Mrs. Penton, "to be wanting in any mark of respect. And after all, Sir Walter was your nearest relation, and you are his successor, so that it is really a death in the family."

She walked to the window as she spoke, and began to draw down the blind. He followed her hastily, and

stopped her with an impatient hand.

"My windows look into the garden. Who is coming into the garden to see whether we pay respect or not? I won't have it anywhere. On the funeral day if you please, but no more. I won't have it!" It did him a little good to have an object for his irritation. She turned round upon him with some surprise, feeling the imperative grasp of his hand upon her arm. Perhaps that close encounter and her startled look affected him; perhaps only the disturbed state in which he was, with all emotions close to the surface. He put his other hand upon her further shoulder, and held her for a moment, looking at her. "My dear," he said, "do you know you're Lady Penton now?"

She gave him another look, full of surprise and almost

consternation.

"I never thought of that," she said.

"No, I never supposed you did—but so it is. There has not been a Lady Penton for thirty years. There couldn't be a better one," he said, with a little emotion, kissing her on the forehead. The look, the caress, the little solemnity of the announcement overcame her. Lady Penton! How could she ever accustom herself to that name, or think it was she who was meant by it? It drove other matters for the moment out of her head. And then the bell rang for dinner—the solid family meal in the middle of the day, which had suited all the habits of the family at Penton Hook. Already it seemed to be out of place. She dried her eyes with a tremulous, half-apologetic hand, and said,

"You know, Edward, the children-must always have

their dinner at this hour."

"To be sure," he replied. "I never supposed there could be any change in that respect."

"And you must want some food," she said, "and a little comfort"—then as she went before him to the door, she paused with a little hesitation, "you know they brought a little girl with them, a niece of Russell Penton's? It is a pity to have a stranger to-day, but they could not help it."

"No, I don't suppose they could help it," said Sir Edward. Neither he nor she knew anything more of their visitor than that she was a little girl, Russell Penton's

niece.

They all met round the table in the usual way, but yet in a way which was not at all usual. The father and mother came in arm-in-arm, after the children had gathered in the dining-room—that is to say, he had taken her arm, placing his hand within it, and pushing her in a little before him into the room. The little children had clambered into their high chairs, and little Molly sat at the lower end, which was her usual place, close to her father's chair, flourishing a spoon in the air, and singing her little song of "Fader, fader!" Molly was always the one that called him to dinner when he was busy, and thus the cry of "fader!" had become associated with dinner in her small mind. The elder ones stood about waiting for their parents, Mab between Ally and Anne, looking curiously on at all the manners and customs of this new country in which she found herself—the unknown habits of a large family, who were not rich-all of which particulars were wonderful in her eyes. Walter, as his mother at once saw, bore a strange aspect—abstracted and far-away—as if his mind were full of anything in the world except the scene around him. Perhaps it was fatigue, for the poor boy had been up all night; perhaps the crisis, which was so extraordinary, and which contradicted everything they had been planning and thinking of. The elder children were all grave, disturbed, a little overawed by all that was coming to pass. And for some time there was scarcely anything said. The little bustle of carving, of serving the children, of keeping them all in order, soon absorbed the mother as if it had been an ordinary day; but at the other end of the table, neither Ally, looking at him with anxious eyes on the one side, nor Molly on the other, got much attention from their father, who was occupied by such different thoughts. Mab was the only one who was free of all arrière pensée. She had scarcely known Sir Walter; how could she be overwhelmed by his death? and it made no difference to her: whereas this plunge into novelty and the undiscovered, was more wonderful to her than anything she had ever known. She watched the children and all their ways—the little clamor of one, the steady perseverance of another, the watchful way in which Horry devoured and kept the lead, observing lest any of the brotherhood should get before him as he worked through his meal—with delighted interest.

"Are they always like that?" she whispered to Anne. "Do you remember all their names? Do they all always eat as much? Oh, the little pigs, what darlings they are!"

cried Mab under her breath.

Anne did not like to hear the children called little pigs,

even though the other word was added.

"They don't eat any more than other children," she said. And Anne, too, if she was not anxious, was at least very curious and eager to hear all that had happened, which only father knew. And father's brow was full of care. They all turned it over in their minds in their different fashions, and asked each other what could possibly have happened worse than had been expected; for already experience had made even these young creatures feel that something worse happening was the most likely, a great deal more probable, than that there was something better. The mother was the most fortunate, who divided and arranged everything, and had to make allowances for Horry's third help when she first put a spoon into the pudding, a matter of severe and abstruse calculation which left little space in the thoughts for lesser things.

When dinner was over, the children all rushed out with that superfluity of spirits which is naturally produced by a full meal—but also a little quarrelsome as well, making a great noise in the hall, and requiring a great deal of management before they could be diverted into the natural channels in which human energy between the ages of twelve and two has to dissipate itself in the difficult moment of the afternoon. When the weather was good they all scampered out into the garden, where indeed Horry and his brothers rushed now with the shouts of the well-fed and self-satisfied. To recover these rebels on one hand, and to get the little tumult of smaller children dancing about in all the passages dispersed and quiet, was a piece of work which employed all the energies of the ladies.

Mab Russell looked on admiring in the midst of that little rabble. She would have liked, above all things, to head an insurrection and besiege the mother and sisters in their own stronghold. She went so far as to hold out her skirts over Horry, who took refuge behind her, seeing the face of an ally where he expected it least. They were all anxious to get the riot over, but Mab, who knew no better, interrupted the course of justice. Oh, how awkward it is to have a stranger in the house when the family affairs are trembling in the balance, and no one knows what is going to happen! This was what Ally and Anne said to each other, almost weeping over that contrariety of fortune, when they were compelled, instead of hearing all about it, to go round the grounds with Mab and show how high the water had come up last year. Anode saw to individual of malinial of mainth

CHAPTER XXVII.

NEW PLANS.

NOTWITHSTANDING all the hinderances that envious fate could send, the news so important to the family got itself circulated among them at last, with the result that the strangest excitement, elation, and despondency, a complication of feelings utterly unknown in their healthful history, took possessoin of the Penton family. They had made up their minds to one thing-they now found themselves and all their projects and plans swallowed up in another. They had adapted themselves, the young ones with the flexibility of youth, to the supposed change in their fortunes. They had now to go back again, to forget all those innumerable consultations, arrangements, conclusions of all kinds, and take up their old plans where they had been abandoned. It had been dreadful to give up Penton. It was scarcely more agreeable to take it back again. And yet an elation, an elevation was in all their minds. Penton was theirs, that palace of the gods. They were no longer nobodies, they were people of importance. The girls found it beyond measure uncomfortable, distracting, insupportable, that on this day of all others, when they had a thousand things to say to each other—questions to ask, suggestions to make, the most amazing revolution to talk over, there should be a stranger always between them, one whom,

with that civility which was born with them, and in which they had been trained, they felt themselves constrained to explain everything to, whom they would not leave out of their conversation or permit to feel that she was an intruder. She was an intruder all the same. She was in the way, horribly in the way, at this eventful moment. The family was dissolved by her presence. The father and mother retired together to the book-room to talk there, a thing they never would have done but for the stranger. And Walter strolled off on his side, scarcely saying a word to his sisters, whom he could not approach or communicate his sentiments to in consequence of Mab. It was a heavy task to the two girls to have to entertain her, to go round and round the garden with her, to point out the views of Penton, to explain to her what it was about, when one or another would burst out into some irrestrainable exclamation or remark; but the fate of womankind in general was upon these devoted young women. They had to entertain the visitor, to occupy themselves with the keeping up of appearances, and to put everything that interested them most aside in their hearts.

"We put this seat here because it is the best view of Penton. No, it isn't very shady in summer, it is a little exposed to the wind, but then Penton—"

We used to be so much interested in every view. Is

this the best, or the one from the top of the hill?"

"Oh, the one on the top of the hill. Oh, I wish Penton

was at the bottom of the sea!"

"I don't," cried Anne. "After all it is only the confusion with having changed our minds. It is so much better not to change one's mind, that lets so many new thoughts come in."

"And most likely the old thoughts were the best," said Ally, softly, with a little sigh. Then she added, "You must think us so strange: but it is only just to-day, for we

are all excited and put out."

"One would think you did not like coming into your fortune," said Mab. "Is it because of old Sir Walter? But Aunt Gerald said you scarcely knew him."

"We never saw him: but it is terrible to think of being

better off because some one has died-"

"And it is more than that. It is because we thought we were to give it all up, and now it seems it is all ours—"

"And we were always brought up to think so very much of it," Ally said. And then she added, "Shouldn't you like to come round and see where the children have their

gardens? it is quite high and dry, it is beyond the highest mark. No flood has ever come up here."

This was the supreme distinction of the terrace and that part of the garden that lay beyond it. They were quite proud to point out its immunity from the floods: as they passed they had a glimpse through the windows of the book-room of Mr. and Mrs. - nay, of Sir Edward and Lady Penton, sitting together, he with a pencil in his hand jotting down something upon a piece of paper, she apparently reckoning up upon the outstretched fingers of her hand. Ally and Anne looked at each other; they would all have been deep in these calculations together if Mab had not been there.

Walter went upon his own way. Perhaps had the visitor been a man he might have had the same confinement, the same embarrassment: but probably he would have undertaken nothing of the sort. Probably he would have thrown over his guest upon the girls. What were girls good for but to undertake this sort of thing, and set more important persons free? For himself he did not feel able for anything but to realize the new position; to turn everything over in his mind, to hurry away to the neighborhood, at least, of the one creature in the world who (he thought) might look at it from his point of view and care what he felt. Could he still think, after the reception she had given him that morning, after the blank which he had found in her, the incapacity to understand him—could he believe still that his tumultuous feelings now and all the ferment in his mind would awaken in her that ideal sympathy and understanding of which he had dreamed? Alas, poor Walter! he knew so little in reality of her: what he knew was his own imagination of her-a perfect thing, incapable of failure, sure to sympathize and console. What he had learned from the failure of the morning was only this, that it must have been his fault, who had not known how to explainhow to make his story clear. It was not she who was to blame. He rushed up the hill with his heart a-flame, thinking of everything. He was now no disinherited knight, no neglected youth whose fate his elders decided without consulting him. Oh, no; very different. He was the heir of Penton! He had attained what he had looked

for all his life. He stood trembling upon the verge of a new existence, full of the tumultuous projects, the unformed resolves that surge upward and boil in the mind of a youth emancipated, whose life has come to such promotion, whose career lies all before him. And to what creature in the world after himself could this be of the same importance as to her who might-oh, wonderful thought!share it with him? He had been far from having this thought in the morning. Then he was but a boy, without any definite plan, with only education before him and vague beginnings, and no certainty of anything. Now he was Walter Penton of Penton, with a position which no man could take from him—not his father even! Nobody could touch him in his rights. Not an acre could be alienated without his consent; nothing could be taken away. And then there was that story about "providing for the boy" which his father had touched on very lightly, but which came back in the strongest sense to the mind of the boy who was to be provided for. He felt the wildest impatience to tell her all this. She would understand him now. She did not know what he meant in the morning, which was, no doubt, his fault. How could she be expected to understand the fantastic discontent that was in his mind? But she would understand now. He had a certainty of this, which was beyond all possibility of mistake, and though he knew that it was very unlikely he should see her at this hour, yet the impulse of his heart was such that nothing else was possible to him but to hurry to the spot where she was-to be near her, to put himself in the way if perchance she should pass by. The painful impression with which in the morning he had seen her in a moment change herself and her aspect, and step down from the position on which she met him to that of Crockford's niece, passed altogether from his mind—or rather it remained as a keen stimulant forcing him to a solution of the mystery which intertwined the harmony with a discord as is the wont of musicians. There could not be any such jarring note. He must account for the jarring note; it was a tone of enchantment the more, a charm disguised.

These were the things he said to himself—or rather he said nothing to himself, but such were the gleams that flew across his mind like glimmers of light out of the sky. He went quickly up the steep hill, breasting it as if his fortune

lay at the top, and a moment's delay might risk it all-until he came within sight of Crockford's cottage, its upper windows twinkling over the rugged bit of hedge that fenced off the little grass-plot in front. Then his pace slackened -the goal was in sight; there was no need for haste-in short, even had she been visible, Walter would have dallied, with that fantastic instinct of the lover which prolongs by deferring the moment of enjoyment. And then at a little distance he could examine the windows, he could watch for some sign or token of her, as he could not do near at hand. He lingered, he stood still on a pretense of looking at the hedge-rows, of examining a piece of lichen on a tree, his eyes all the time furtively turning toward that rude little temple of his soul. What a place to be called by such a name! And yet the place was not so much to be found fault with. The hedge was irregular and broken, raised a little bove the path, with a rough little bit of wall, all ferns and mosses, supporting the bank of earth from which it grew; above it, glistening in the low red rays of the afternoon sun, were the lattice windows of the upper story, with the eaves of an uneven roof-old tiles covered with every kind of growth—overshadowing them; a cottage as unlike as possible to those dreadful dwellings of the poor which are the result of sanitary science and economy combined; a little human habitation harmonized by age and use with all its surroundings, and which no one need be ashamed to call home. So Walter said to himself as he stood and looked at it in the light of romance and the afternoon sun. It was as venerable as Penton itself, and had many features in common with the great house. It was more respectable and more levely than the damp gentility of Penton Hook, which was old-new, with plaster peeling off, and a shabby modernism in its vulgar walls. Crockford's cottage pretended to nothing, it was all it meant to be. It was in its way a beautiful place, being so harmonized by nature, so well adapted to its uses. Walter's estimate of it increased as the moments went on. He felt at last that to bring his bride from such an abode was next door to bringing her from an ideal palace of romance; perhaps better even than that, seeing that there would be all the pleasure of setting her in the sphere which she would adorn; for would not she adorn-it was an old-fashioned phrase, yet one that suited the occasion—any sphere?

He was interrupted in these thoughts by the sound of steps approaching. All was silent, alas! in the cottage. The door was shut, for it was very cold weather, and no one appeared at a window; there was not a movement of life about. Walter knew that the room in which they lived (i. e. the kitchen) looked to the back. The approaching passenger, therefore, did not convey any hopes to his mind, but only annoyed him, making him leave off that silent contemplation of the shrine of his love, which he had elaborately concealed by a pretended examination of the lichens on the tree. If any one was coming, that pretense, he felt, was not enough, and he accordingly continued his walk very slowly up the hill in order to meet the new-comer whoever he might be. When he came in sight he was not, as Walter had expected, a recognizable figure, but unmistakably a stranger—a man whose dress and appearance were as unlike as possible to anything which belonged to the village. He was a young man, rather undersized, in a coat with a fur collar, a tall hat, a muffler of a bright color, a large cigar, and a stick of the newest fashion. He was indeed all of the newest fashion, fit for Bond Street, and much more like that locality than a village street. Walter was not very learned in Bond Street, but he laughed to himself as he made this conclusion, feeling that Bond Street would not acknowledge such a glass of fashion. The stranger was looking at Crockford's cottage with a glass stuck in his eye, and a sort of contemptuous examination, which proved that he made a very different estimate of it from that which Walter had just done. When he in his turn heard Walter's step upon the road, he seemed to wake up to the consciousness of being looked at, in a way which aroused the contempt of the young native. He gave himself various little pulls together, took his cigar from his mouth with an energetic puff, put up his disengaged hand to his cravat with an involuntary movement to arrange something, and settled his shoulders into his coat-gestures corresponding to the little shake and shuffle with which some women prepare themselves to be seen, however elaborate their toilet may have been before. Then he quickened his steps a little to meet Walter, who came toward him very slowly, with a quite uncalled-for sentiment of contempt. Why should a youth in knickerbockers, in the rough roads of his native parish, feel himself superior to a

gentleman visitor in the apparel of the higher orders, coming (presumably) out of Bond Street? Who can explain this mystery? No doubt it was balanced by a still stronger feeling of the same kind on the other side. The stranger came forward evidently with the intention of asking information. He was a sandy-haired and rather florid young man, with a badly grown mustache and little tufts of colorless beard. His hat was a little on one side, and the hair upon which it was poised glistened and shone. The level sun came in his eyes and made him blink; it threw a light which was not flattering over all his imperfections of color and form.

"Beg your pardon," he said, with a slight stammer as they approached each other, "you couldn't tell me, could you, where one—Crockton or Croaker, or some such name, lives about here?"

"Croaker?" said Walter. With Crockford's cottage before his eyes, what could be more simple? The suggestion was too evident to be mistaken, as was also the other suggestion, which came like a flash of lightning, and made his eyes shine with angry fire. "I know nobody of the name," he said, quietly, making a rapid step forward; and then it occurred to him that the information thus sought might be supplied easily by any uninterested passer-by, and he paused, feeling that it was necessary to plant himself there on the defense. "What sort of a man do you want? What is he?" he asked.

"Ah, no sort of a man at all—it's—it's a cottage, I believe. He may be a cobbler or a plow-boy, or a—anything you please. Am I the sort of person to know such people's trades? It's a—it's a— Look here, I'll make it worth your while if you'll help me. It's a lady I want."

"Oh, a lady!" said Walter. He felt the blood flush to his face; but this the inquirer, occupied with his own business, did not remark. He came close, turning off the smoke of his cigar with his hand.

"Look here," he said, in a loud whisper, "I'll make it worth your while. It'll be as good as a suv—, well, I may say if you'll really find out what I want, as good as a fiver in your pocket. Oh, I say, what's the matter? I don't mean no harm."

"I wonder who you take me for," cried Walter, whose

sudden move forward had thrown the other back in mingled

astonishment and alarm.

The stranger eyed him from head to foot with a puzzled look, which finally awoke a little amusement in Walter's angry soul. "Don't know you from Adam," he said, "and I ain't used to fellows in knickerbockers. Swells wear them, and gamekeepers wear them. If you're a swell I beg your pardon, that's all I can say."

This prayer it pleased Walter graciously to grant. He began to enter into the humor of the situation. And then, to save her from some vulgar persecutor, was not that worth a little trouble? "Never mind," he said, "who I am. I know all the ladies that live here. Which of them

is it that you want?"

"Well, she don't live here," said the other. "Yes, to be sure, she's here for the moment, with one Croaker, or something like that. But she's not one of the ladies of the place; she's not, perhaps, exactly what you would call a—Yes, she is though—she's awfully well educated. She talks—oh, a great deal better than most of the swellest people you meet about. I've met a good few in my day," he said, with an air, caressing his mustache. "I don't know nobody that comes up to her, for my part."

He was a little beast—he was a cad—he was a vulgar little beggar: he was not a gentleman, nor anything like it. But still he seemed to have a certain comprehension. Walter's heart softened to him in spite of all provocations. "I don't think," he said, but more gently than he could have thought possible, "that you will meet any one of that sort

here."

"No? you don't think so. But they'd keep her very close, don't you see. Fact is, she was sent off to keep her out of a young fellar's way. A young swell you know, a—a friend of mine, with a good bit of money coming to him, and his people didn't think her good enough. Oh, I don't think so—not a bit. I'm all on the true love side. But where there's money, don't you know, there's always difficulties made."

"I suppose so," said Walter, with momentary gravity. And there came before him for a moment a horrible realization—something he had never thought of before. "But I don't think," he added, "that you will find any such lady here." He was so young and simple that it was a certain

ease to his conscience to put it in this way. He said to himself that he was telling no lie. He was not saying that there was no such lady here, only that he didn't think the other would find her-which he shouldn't, at least so long as Walter could help it. This little equivocation gave great comfort and ease to his mind.

"Don't you, though?" said the stranger, discouraged. "But I'm almost sure this was the village, near the river, and not far from-it answers to all the directions-if only I could find Croaker-or Crockton, or a name like that.

I'm a dreadful fellow for muddling names."
"I'll tell you what," said Walter, "it may be Endsleigh, about two miles further on; that's near the river, and not far from Reading, which I suppose is what you mean—a pretty little village where people go in summer. And, to be sure, there's some people named Croaker there; I remember the name—over a shop—with lodgings to let that's the place," he cried, with a little excitement. all this was quite true, and yet elaborately false in intention, a combination to delight any such young deceiver. "Come along," he cried, "I'll show you the way. It lies straight before you, and Croaker's is just as you go into the village. You can't miss it. I've earned that fiver," he said, with a laugh, "but you're welcome to the informa-

tion-for love."

"For love!" cried the other; and he gave the young fellow a very doubtful look, then threw a suspicious glance around as if he might possibly find some reasons lying about on the road why this young stranger should attempt to deceive him. But after all, why should a young swell in knickerbockers desire to deceive the man of Bond Street? There could be no reason. He took out his cigar-case, and offered a large and solid article of that description to Walter's acceptance, who took it with great gravity. "I can't thank you any way else—they're prime ones I can tell you," he said, and with a flourish of his stick, by way of farewell, took the way pointed out to him. Walter stood and watched him with a curious mingling of satisfaction and mischief. He threw the cigar into the ditch. It was a bad one, he had no doubt, which, perhaps, made it less a sacrifice to throw away this reward of guile.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A DECISIVE MOMENT.

Bur when this little adventure was over, it made no difference to the longing and eagerness in the boy's heart. Indeed, he wanted to see her more than ever, to find out from her who this fellow was, what he had to do with her, why he was seeking her. Could it be possible that she felt any interest in such a creature? that she—might have married him, perhaps. Could this be? He had spoken as if it was he who had been the prize. She had been sent away in order not to be a danger for him. Walter snapped the branch of a tree he had seized hold of as if it had been a twig, as the thought passed through his mind. And then he was seized with a half-hysterical fit of laughter. Him, that fellow! that little beast! that cad! that— There were no words that could express his contempt and scorn and merriment, but it was not merriment of a comfortable kind. When his laugh was over, he went round and round the house without seeing any one—all was closed, the doors shut, nobody at the windows, nothing at all stirring. One or two people passed, and looked wondering to see him wander about, up and down like a ghost; but he neither saw her nor any trace of her. The red glitter went out of the windows, the sun sunk lower and lower, and then went out, leaving nothing but the winter gray which so soon settled toward night. And by and by Walter found himself compelled by the force of circumstances to turn his back upon the cottage, and go down the steep road again toward home. The force of circumstances at this particular moment meant the family tea-and the strange, tragical, foolish complication of his own high romance and enthusiasm of love, for which he was ready to defy anything—and the youthfulness and childishness of his position, which made it criminal for him not to be in for tea—was one of those things which confuse with ridicule all that is most serious in the world. He saw with an acute pang how absurd it was; but he could not emancipate himself. The thought of the family consternation, the question on all sides, Where is Wat? his father's irritation, and his moth-

er's wonder, and the apologies of the girls, and the suggestions of accident, of some catastrophe, something terrible to account for his non-appearance, were all quite visible and apparent to him; and the grotesque incompatibility of these bonds, with the passionate indulgence of his own will and wish upon which his mind was fixed. He saw all these circumstances also with a curious faculty, half of sympathy, half of repulsion, through the eyes of the little visitor, the little intruder, the girl who had suddenly become a member of the household, and who was there observing everything. She would remark the unwillingness with which he appeared, and she would remark, he felt certain, his absence both before and after, and would ask herself where he went, a question which, so far as Walter was aware, not even his mother had begun to ask as yet. He had an stinctive conviction that Mab would ask it, that she would see through him, that she would divine what was in his heart. And when they all met about the homely table on more, the children intent upon their bread and but mother apportioning all the cups of tea, the milk-andto some, the portions of cake-Walter seemed to himself to be taking part in some scene of a comedy curiously intoposed between the acts of an exciting drama. A cold worm, out of doors, spreading all around, with the strange counters in it, with understandings and misunderstanding which made the blood run cold, and sent the heart bounding into high passion and excitement, into feverish resolve and wild daring, and the madness of desperationand in the very midst a sudden pause, the opening of . door, and then the confused chatter of the children, the sound of the teacups, the lamp which smelled of paraffin the bread and butter-how laughable it was, how hun lous, what a contrast, what a slavery, how petty in the midst of all the passions and agitations that lay around. Presently, Walter, in his boyish ingenuousness, began to feel a little proud that he, so simple as he sat there in fumes of the household tea, was in reality a distracted well-nigh triumphant lover, meaning to put his for the touch that very night, to pledge his new life and an might bring. They thought him nothing more than a ! to be sent to school again, to be guided at their will, whe he was a man and on the eve of an all-important decision about to dispose of his existence. He caught Mab's eyes

this thought swelled in his mind. They were not penetrating or keen eyes; they were blue, very soft, smiling, child-like, lighted up with amused observation, noticing everything. But Walter felt them go through him as none of the other accustomed familiar eyes did. She saw there was something more than usual about him. She would divine when he disappeared that his going away meant something. The family took no heed of his absence: he had gone out to take a turn, they would say: perhaps his father would grumble that he ought to be at his books. But only that little stranger would divine that Walter's absence meant a great deal more—that it meant a romance, a noem; a drama, and that it consumed his entire life.

a poem; a drama, and that it consumed his entire life. The dispersing of the children, the game of play permitted to Horry and the small brothers, the going to bed of the rest, made a moment of tumult and agitation. And in the midst of this Walter stole out unperceived into the air of the night. It was clear as a crystal, the sky mining, almost crackling with a sudden frost, the stars twinkling out of their profound blue, with such a sharp and icy brilliancy as occurs only now and then in the hardest winter. The air was so clear and exhilarating that wafter did not find it cold; indeed he was too much excited 3to be sensible of anything save the refreshment and keen restorative pinch of that nipping and eager atmosphere. As he hurried up the hill the blood ran riot in his veins, his heart seemed to bound and leap forward as if it had an independent life. He found himself under the hedge of Crockford's cottage in a few minutes, with the feeling that habad flown or floated there, though his panting breath fold of the rush he had actually made. The moon, which had but newly risen, was behind the cottage, and consequently all was black under the hedge, concealing him in the profoundest darkness. He was glad to pause there in hat covert and ante-chamber of nature to regain command himself, to get his breath and collect his thoughts—to how he was to make his presence known. She had somehow divined that he was there on other nights, but bethis was a more important occasion, and he felt that he 19 would be justified in defying all the restrictions put upon mim, and letting even the Crockfords, the old people of the house, know that he was there. It was true that the idea of old Crockford daunted him a little. The old man had

2-2d half.

a way of saying things; he had a penetrating, cynical look. But it would be strange indeed, Walter reflected, if he who was not afraid of fate, who was about to defy the world in arms, should be afraid of an old stone-breaker on the roads. The thought passed through his mind, and brought a smile to his face as he stood in the dark, recovering his breath. All was perfectly silent in the night around. The village had shut itself up against the cold. There was nobody near. The heat and passion in Walter's being seemed to stand like an image of self-concentrated humanity, independent of all the influences about, indifferent, even antagonistic, throbbing with a tremendous interest in the midst of those petty personal concerns of which the world thought nothing, but in himself a world higher than nature, altogether distinct from it. The little bit of shadow swallowed him up, yet neither shadow nor light made any difference to the mind which felt all moons and stars and the whole system of the universe inferior to its own burning purpose and intense tumultuous thoughts.

But while he stood there, indifferent to the whole earth about him, a little sound of the most trivial character suddenly caught his ear, and made every nerve tingle. It was a sound no more important than the click of the latch of the cottage door. Had she heard him, then, though he was not aware of having made any sound? Had she divined him with a mind so much more sensitive than that of ordinary mankind? He stood holding his breath, listening for her step, imagining it to himself, the little skim along the pavement, the touch when she paused, firm yet so light. He heard it in his thoughts, in anticipation: but in reality that was not what he heard. Something else sounded in his ears which made his veins swell and his heart bound, yet not with pleasure—a voice which seemed to affront the stillness and offend the night, a voice without any softness or grace either of tone or words-something alive and hostile to every feeling in his heart, and which seemed to Walter's angry fancy to jar upon the very air. And then there followed a sound of steps; they were coming to the gate. She was with him, accompanying him, seeing him off. Was it possible? Walter made a step forward and clinched his fist; he then changed his mind and drew back.

"Anyhow, you'll think it over," said the voice of the man whom he had met on the road. "It's a good offer.

ain't every day you'll get as good. A good blow-out and good breakfast, and all that, would suit me just as well you. I ain't ashamed of what I'm doing; and you'd look stunning in a veil and all that. But what's the good of making a fuss? It's fun, too, doing a thing on the sly."

And was it her voice that replied? "Yes, it's fun. I don't mind that, not a bit. I should just like to see it put on the stage. You and me coming in, and your mother's

look. Oh, her look! that's what fetches me!"

It could not be her, not her! and yet the voice was hers; and the subdued peal of laughter had in it a tone which he had felt to thrill the air with delight on other occasions; but not now. The man laughed more harshly, more loudly: and then they appeared at the gate in the moonlight. He so near them, unable to stir without betraying himself, was invisible in the gloom. But the light caught a great white shawl in which she had muffled herself, and made a sort of reflection in the tall shiny hat. They stood for a minute there, almost within reach of his hand.

"Don't you stand chattering," she said; "it's time for your train; and I tell you it's a mile off, and you'll have to

run."

"There's plenty of time," said he. "I should just like to know who was that young spark that sent me off out of my way to-day. I believe it's some one that's sweet upon you too, and as you're holding in hand—"

"Nonsense," she said, "I see nobody here."

"Oh, tell that to—them that knows no better; see nobody; only every fellow about that's worth looking at; as if I didn't know your little ways!"

She laughed a little, not displeased; and then said, "There's nobody worth looking at; but let me again say, go; the old man will be out after me. He won't believe you've got a message from mother; he doesn't now. He

doesn't believe a word I say."

"No more should I if I was in his place. Oh, I know your little ways. You'll have to give them over when we're married, Em. It's a capital joke now, don't you know, but when we're married—"

"We're not married yet," she said, "and perhaps never

will be, if you don't mind."

"Oh, I say! When we've just settled how it's to be done, and all about it! But look here, don't you have any-

thing to say to that young 'un in the knickerbockers. He's cute, whoever he is. He might have put me off the scent altogether. I couldn't have done it cleverer myself. Don't let him guess what's going on. He's just the one, that fellow is, to let the old folks know, and spoil our fun.'

"Look here," said the girl, "I warn you, Ned, you'll

lose your train."

"Not I. I'll make a run for it. Good-bye, Em!"

Great heavens! did he dare to touch her, to approach his head with the shiny hat still poised upon it to hers. The grotesque horror overwhelmed Walter as he stood trembling with rage and misery. There was a little murmuring of hushed words and laughter, and then a sudden movement: "Be off with you," she said, and the man rushed away through the gleams of the moonlight, his steps echoing along the road. She stood and looked after him, with her white shawl wrapped round her head and shoulders, moving from one foot to the other with a light buoyant movement as if to keep herself warm. The motion, the poise of her figure, the lingering, all seemed to speak of pleasure. Walter stood in the dark with his teeth set and his hand clinched, and misery fierce and cruel in his soul. It seemed impossible to him to suffer more. He had touched the very bottom of the deepest sea of wretchedness; the bitterness of death he thought had gone over him, quenching his very soul and all his projects. His love, his hopes, his wishes seemed all to have melted into one flame of fury, fierce rage, and hate, which shook his very being. It seemed to Walter that he could almost have murdered her where she stood within three paces of him; and if the veil of darkness had been suddenly withdrawn the boldest might have shuddered at the sight of that impersonation of wrath, standing drawn back to keep himself quiet, his hand clinched by his side, his eyes blazing as they fixed upon her, within reach of the unconscious watcher, so light and pleased and easy, not knowing the danger that was so near. Her head was turned away from him watching her lover—her lover!—as he rattled along the road; and when Walter made a sudden step forward out of the shade, she started with a suppressed alarmed cry and wail of terror.

"Mr. Penton! you here!"

"Yes. I've been here—too long."

[&]quot;Oh, Mr. Penton," cried the girl, "you've heard what

we've been saying! Do you call that like a gentleman to listen to what people are saying? You have no right to make any use of it. You did not put us on our guard. You have no right to make any use of what you heard when we didn't know."

Walter came up to her, close to her, and put his hand upon the fleecy whiteness of her shawl, into which it seemed

to sink as into snow.

"Will you tell me this?" he said. "You are one person to old Crockford, another to him, another to me.

Which is you?"

A man who has been injured acquires an importance, a gravity, which no other circumstances can give him; and the tone of his misery was in Walter's voice. He imposed upon her and subdued her in spite of herself. She shrunk a little away from him and began to cry.

"It is not my fault! I never asked you to notice me. I

never pretended I was any one—not your equal—not—"

"Which is you?" he said. Through the soft shawl he reached her arm at last, and grasped it firmly, yet with a weakening, a softening. How could he help it when he felt her in his power? Through her shawl, and through the mist of rage and bitterness about him, the quick-witted creature felt how the poor boy's heart was touched, and began to melt at the contact of her arm.

Which—is me? Oh," she cried, "you don't know me—you don't know my circumstances, or you would not ask. You don't know what I come from, nor how I have been surrounded all my life. It is the best that is me! It

is, whatever you may think."

Her arm quivered in his grasp; her slight figure seemed to vibrate so near to him. It appeared to his confused brain that her whole being swayed and wavered with the appeal he made to her. She lifted her face to his, and that too was quivering in every line. She was entirely in his power, to be shaken, to be annihilated at his will, and he had the power over her of right as well as of strength.

"The best—I don't know which is the best. I came up to tell you—to ask you—to let you decide. And I find you

with a man who -is going to marry you."

"He thinks so, perhaps; but a man can't marry one

without one's own consent."

"Your consent! You seemed to agree to everything he

said!" cried the young man in his rage. "A fellow like that! A cad—a— And I waiting here—waiting to see you—oh!" He flung her arm from him, almost throwing her off her balance. But when he saw her totter, compunction seized the unhappy boy. "You make me a brute!" he cried; "I've hurt you!" and felt as if, in the stillness of the night, and the despair of his heart, his voice

sounded like a wild beast's cry.

"You have hurt me—only in my heart," she said. "Oh, but listen. I know it all looks bad enough; but you listened to him, and you must listen to me. You think he's not good enough for me, Mr. Penton; but a little while ago he was thought far too good, and I—perhaps I thought so, too. Not—oh, not now. Wait a minute before you cry out. Who had I ever seen that was better? I had heard of other kind of people in books, but either I thought they didn't live now, or at least they were far, far out of my reach. I never knew a gentleman till—till—"

"Her voice died away; it had been getting lower, softer, complaining, pleading—now it seemed to die away altogether, fluttering in her throat.

"Till?" Walter's voice too was choked by emotion and excitement. The strong current of his thoughts and wishes, so violently interrupted, found a new channel and flooded all the obstructions away. Till-! Could anything be more pathetic than this confusion and self-revelation? You did not tell him so," he said, with a remnant of his wrath—a sort of rag of resentment, which he caught at as it flew away. "You let him believe it was he; you made him understand-"

"Mr. Penton," she cried, "listen. What am I to do? You've sought me out, you've been far too kind; but I can't let myself be a danger to you too. You know it never, never would be allowed if it were known you were coming here to me. And now that I've known you, how can I bear living here and not seeing you? It was the only charm, the only pleasure— Oh, I'm shameless to tell you, but it's true."

"Emmy," said the lad, in his infatuation, laying once more his hand on her arm, but this time trembling himself with feeling and tenderness, "if it's true, how could you—how could you let that man—"

"Mr. Penton, just hear me out. He can take me away

from this, and give me a home, and take me out of the way of harming you. Oh, don't you see how I am torn asunder! If I throw him over there's no hope for me. Oh, what am I to do? What am I to do?"

Walter was moved beyond himself with an impulse of enthusiasm, of devotion, which seemed to turn his feeling in a moment into something sacred—not the indulgence of his own will, but the most generous of inspirations. He put his arm round her, and supported her in her trembling and weakness.

"Emmy," he said, his young voice ineffably soft and full of tears—"Emmy, darling, we'll find a better way."

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CHAPTER XXIX.

THE FUNERAL DAY.

THE day of Sir Walter Penton's funeral was a great if gloomy holiday for the whole country about. A man so old, and so little known to the neighborhood, could not be greatly mourned. He had kept up, no doubt, the large charities which it is the worthy privilege of a great family to maintain for the benefit of the country, but he had never appeared in them, and few people associated a personal kindness with the image of the stately old man who had been seen so seldom for years past. The people in the village and all the houses scattered along the road were full of excitement and curiosity. The carriages which kept arriving all the morning gradually raised the interest of the spectators toward the great climax of the funeral procession, which it was expected would be half a mile long, and embraced everybody of any importance in the neighborhood, besides the long line of the tenantry. And then the flowers —that new evidence of somber vanity and extravagant fashion. To see these alone was enough to draw a crowd. In the heart of the winter, just after Christmas, what masses of snowy blossoms, piled up, crushing and spoiling each other. However, that cost as much as more delivered to the first and spoiling and spoiling that the first cost as much as much as more delivered. each other-flowers that cost as much as would have fed a parish! The villagers stood with open mouths of wonder. No one there in all their experiences of life—all the weddings, christenings, summer festivals of their recollection—had seen such a display. The procession, headed by no black mournful hearse, such as would have seemed natural

to the lookers-on, but by a sort of triumphal car, covered

with flowers, drew forth crowds all along the way.

The Pentons, who were now the lords of all-or rather of as little as was practicable, for all that was unentailed naturally went without question to Sir Walter's daughterhad not a carriage of their own in which to swell the procession. And though they were now naturally in the chief place, they were perhaps the least known of all the rural potentates, great and small, who shook hands in silence, with looks of sympathy more or less solemn, with Mr. Russell Penton after the ceremony was over. Sir Edward, indeed, the new baronet, had known them all in his day; but Walter looked on with a half-defiant shyness, with scarcely an acquaintance in the multitude. And the sensation was very strange to both father and son when all the train had dispersed and they came back to the great house which was henceforward theirs. Mrs. Russell Penton had not since the moment of her father's death made any show of her grief. She had been entirely stricken down on that day. A frightful combination and mingling of emotions had prostrated her. Grief for her father; ah, yes! He had been perhaps the one individual in the world upon whose full comprehension she had leaned; but in his dying even this had failed her, and she felt that he comprehended her and she him no longer, and that at the last moment his steps had strayed from hers. A more bitter and terrible discovery could not be; and when with that came the sense that all her hopes had failed—that the plans so nearly brought to some practical possibility had all come to nothing-that everything was too late-that, instead of securing her home for an eternal possession, which was what her eager spirit desired, she had only presented herself to the world in the aspect of a grasping woman, endeavoring to take advantage of a poor man and seize his inheritancewhen all this became apparent to her, Alicia covered her face and withdrew from the light of day. The loss of one who had been the chief object in her life for so long, the father whom she had loved, was not much more than a pretense (and she felt this too to the bottom of her heart) for the misery that overwhelmed her; which was not grief only, but disappointment almost more bitter than grief; disenchantment and failure mingled with the sorrow and loss, and made them more keen and poignant than words

can tell. And she was ashamed that it should be soashamed that, when all around her gave her credit for thus profoundly mourning her father, she was mourning in him her own disappointed hopes, her disgust, her failure, as well as the loss her heart had sustained. This consciousness was in itself one of the bitterest parts of her burden. Her husband came into the room with sympathetic looks, her maid stole about on tiptoe, everything was kept in darkness and quiet to soothe her grief. And yet her grief was but a small part of what her proud spirit was suffering. To feel that this was so was almost more than she could bear.

After the first day she would indeed bear it no longer. She would permit no more of that obsequious tenderness which is given to sorrow, but got up and came forth to take her usual place in the house and fulfill her ordinary duties, refusing as much as she could the praises lavished upon her for her self-control and unselfishness and regard for others. She "bore up" wonderfully, everybody said; but Alicia, to do her justice, would have none of the applause which was murmured about her. "I did not expect my father would live forever," she said, with a tone of impatience to her husband; "and to lie there and think everything over again, is that to be desired? I would rather feel I had some duty still and claims upon me."

"Oh, many claims," he said; "but you must not overtask your strength."

She had no fear of overtasking her strength, but rather a feeling that if she could get to work—as her maid did, as the house-maids did, to prepare for her departure and the entry of the other family—that would be the thing which would do her good. After the funeral she came out in her deep mourning, out of the library, in which she had been spending that solemn hour, to meet the chief mourners when they returned. It would have pleased her better to have been chief mourner herself; but it had been said on all hands that it would be "too much for her." So she had spent the time while the slow cortege was winding along the country road and all the gloomy formulas were being fulfilled, by herself in the old man's favorite room, where everything spoke of him, reading the funeral service over and over, thinking—now they will be there, and there; now arrived at the grave; now leaving him—beside the

boys. It was that thought that brought the tears. Beside the boys! They had lain there for twenty years and more, but she could still shed tears for them; for all the rest her eyes were dry. And when the carriages came back she came out quite composed, though so pale, in all the solemnity of her mourning, covered with crape, to the drawingroom to receive them. She had bidden her husband to bring the new proprietor back with him, that everything might at once be said which remained to say. She gave her hand to Edward, who came forward to meet her, he too in deep mourning; but her eye went beyond him to "the boy" who stood behind, and whose slight young figure seemed to hold itself more erect, and with an air of greater self-belief than when she saw him last. What wonder! he

was the heir.

"I wanted to see you," she said. "Gerald will have told you—that everything might be put at once on the footing we wish it to be."

"I told you, Alicia, that your cousin would not hurry you. He is as anxious as I am that you should have no trouble. We have talked it all over—"

"Why shouldn't I have trouble?" she said. "There is no reason in the world for sparing me my share of the roughness. I am better so Edward if you should wish roughness. I am better so. Edward, if you should wish to get possession soon, you and your wife, you may be sure I will put no obstacles in your way.".

"I wish you would believe that we have no wish, no desire. We want you to act exactly as may suit you best-to

consider yourself still in your own house."

"That is impossible," she said, quickly; "mine it is not, nor ever was; and now that he is gone who was its natural master--I know perfectly well how considerate you will be. What I am expressing is my own wish-not to be in your way-not to put off your settling down. You have a large family—you will want to settle everything."

At this Sir Edward began to clear his throat, and it took

him some time to get out the next words.
"Alicia," he said, "we have been thinking a great deal

about it, my wife and I."

"Yes, you must naturally have thought about it. Mrs. Penton "—here the speaker paused, grew red, hesitated a little, and then went on—"she must wish to have everything decided about the removal, and to know what furniture will be wanted, and a great deal besides. If you would like to bring her to see for herself, and judge what is necessary—I hope you understand me—my husband and I will give every facility."

"My dear, your cousin knows all that," said Russell

Penton, not without impatience.

"It was something else I wanted to say. My wife—is a

woman of great sense, Alicia."

Mrs. Russell Penton made a slight bow of assent. She had nothing to do with his wife. She did not like to hear of her at all, the woman who was now Lady Penton, and yet was a woman of no account, an insignificant mother of a family. This description, which the person to whom it belongs is generally somewhat proud of, is often to women without that distinction a contemptuous way of dismissing an individual of whom nothing else can be said. Edward Penton's wife was no more than that. Sense! Oh, yes, she might have sense, so far as her brood and its wants were concerned.

"She always thought—an opinion which, however, she did not express till very lately, and in which I did not agree—that this house, which you and my poor uncle kept up so splendidly—"

Alicia gave an impatient wave of her hand. She could not see why Sir Walter should be called poor because he

was dead.

"Yes," said Sir Edward, "it has been splendidly kept up; nothing could be more beautiful, or in better taste. You always had admirable taste, Alicia; and my poor dear uncle—"

"Don't," she cried; "what is it you want to say? I beg your pardon, Edward, if I am impatient. For Heaven's

sake come to the point."

"I know," he said, with a compassionate look, "grief is irritable. My wife has always been of opinion that for us, with our large family, the possession of Penton would be no advantage. We could not keep it up as it has been kept up. The entailed estates by themselves are not—you must have a little patience with me, my dear Alicia, or I never can get out what I have to say."

She seated herself with a sigh of endurance. All this was intolerable to her. She wanted nothing to be said, but simply that she should go away, who no longer could keep

possession, and that they who had the right should come in —no struggle about it, not a word said, not a lament on her side, and if possible not a flourish of trumpets on theirs —at least, not anything that she should hear. It was like Edward to maunder on, though he must have known that she could not endure it. And his wife with her sense! But an appearance of dignity must be kept up, and she must, she knew, hear out what he had to say.

"Go on," said Russell Penton, "you can understand that she is not able for very much." And he came and stood by the back of his wife's chair with his usual undemonstrative self-forgetfulness, full of sympathy for her, though he did not approve of her—all of which things she

knew.

"It comes to this," said Edward Penton, a little confused in his story; "I did not agree with her at all. When we entered into the negotiations—which have come to nothing—I did it without any heart. It was only on the morning I spent here, you know, the morning that—it was only then I perceived that my wife was right. We have talked it over since, Alicia, and I have a proposal to make you. If you like to remain—"

She got up from her chair suddenly, clinching her hands in impatience. "No, no, no, no," she cried, almost violently, "I want to hear nothing more about it. There is

nothing, nothing more to say."

"If you would but hear me out, Alicia! this that I'm speaking of would really be a favor to us. We have not the means to keep it up. We have things to think of, of far more importance than the gardens and glass and all that. We have our children to think of. The house is a great deal to you—and—and it's something to me that know it so well; but to them—to them it doesn't matter,' he said, with a sort of contempt for the Pentons who were only half Pentons though they were his children. "I would rather a great deal you kept it and lived in it, and remained as you have been."

There was a curious little by-play going on in the meantime. Walter listened to his father with consternation, moving a step nearer, looking on eagerly as if desiring to interfere in his own person—while over the face of Russell Penton there came a shade of anxiety, suspense, and annoyance. He was sufficiently calm to put out his hand keeping Walter back; but he was no longer a mere spectator of the interview. Alarm was in his face; he had thought he had escaped, and here was the chain again ready to drag him back. Sir Edward turned to him at the end of his little speech with a direct appeal, "Speak to her, Russell; I make the offer in a friendly spirit. There's nothing behind," he said.

"That I am sure of, but it is for Alicia to answer. She

must decide, not me." V

"I have decided," said Mrs. Penton, with something like suppressed passion. "No; if it had been mine I should have been glad, why should I deny it? I was born here. I like it better than any other place in the world. But there are some things more important than even the house in which one was born. Go back to your wife, Edward, and tell her I dare say she understands many things, but me she doesn't understand. To owe my house to your civility and hers, to hold it at your pleasure, no, no—a thousand times. Perhaps you mean well—I will say I am sure you mean well; but I couldn't do it. Gerald, there's been enough of this, I should like to go away."

Over Russell's face there shot a gleam of satisfaction; but he did not let it appear in what he said. "Alicia, you must not be hasty. Your cousin can mean nothing but kindness. Let me tell him you will think of it. He does not want an immediate answer. You might be sorry

after-"

"Gerald! it is not a thing you have ever wished."

"No, I am like your cousin's wife," he said, with a slight laugh. "But what has that to do with it? It is for

you to judge; and you might repent-"

She cast a glance round the stately room, with all the beautiful furniture so carefully chosen to enhance and embellish it. Can one help the hideous thoughts that against one's will come into one's mind? Swift as lightning there flashed before her a picture of what it would be—the pictures gone, the rich carpets, in which the foot sunk, the hangings of satin and velvet—and the whole furnished as an upholsterer would do it, called in in a hurry, and kept to the lowest possible estimate; and then the children of all ages, rampant, running over everything. She saw this in her imagination, and with it at the same instant felt a shrinking of horror from the desecration, and a horrible

momentary exultation. Yes, exultation! over the difference, over the contrast. It was better so; the stateliness and splendor must sink with her reign. With the others, her supplanters, would come in squalor, pettiness, all the unlovely details of poverty. It gave her a sense almost of guilty pleasure that the contrast should be so marked beyond all possibility of mistake.

"No," she said, with forced composure, "I shall not repent. This chapter of life is over. It has been long, far longer than is usually permitted to a woman. I shall not interfere with you, Edward; it is your place, and you must take it. Good-bye; it was only to tell you that no hinderance should be raised on my part-that as soon al-

most as you please—as soon as it is possible—"

"There was something else, Alicia, you meant to say."

"What else?" Her eyes followed her husband's to where Walter stood; then a sudden flush covered her pale face. "Yes, that is true—it is concerning your son. Mr. Rochford will give you the papers, and my husband will explain. My father had an idea, I can not think how it arose; but

he had an idea, and it is my business to carry it out."

"Then is this all?" cried Edward Penton; for his part, he was not even curious as to what had been done for Walter. He almost resented it as she did. "Is this all? You will not allow us to offer-you will not listen. After all, if I am my poor uncle's successor I am still your cousin, Alicia. It is not my fault."

"It is no one's fault," she said.

"And we all feel for you. Even were it a sacrifice we should be glad to make it. My wife—"

Mrs. Russell Penton rose hurriedly. "You are very kind," she said. "Good-bye, Edward; I have had a great deal to try me, and I don't think I can bear any more."

She hurried out of the room as the servant came in with a message. She could not bear to hear the new title, and yet how could she avoid hearing it? Sir Edward—it was in her ears all the time. And when her husband had said in that cumbrous way, "your cousin's wife," there had passed through her mind the "Lady Penton" which he would not say, which she could not say, which seemed to choke her. Lady Penton, her mother's name! And it was all perfectly just and right. This was what made it so intolerable. They had a right to the name. They had a right to

the position. And nothing could be more wretched, envious, miserable than the exasperation in her soul.

CHAPTER XXXX.

AFTERWARD.

EVERYTHING was very quiet at the Hook on the funeral day; all the blinds were drawn down, even those which could be seen only from the garden and the river, and Mrs. Penton-nay, Lady Penton, though she did not easily fall into the title, and, indeed, until Sir Walter was buried scarcely felt it right to bear it—had quite a little festival of mourning all to herself with the girls, who had no inclination to gainsay her. They knew nothing of the vagaries of girls of the present epoch, and it never occurred to them to go against anything she proposed or to doubt its propriety, though if there was an absurd side to it they saw that too later on, and made their little criticisms, no doubt, with little jokes to each other, not to be ventilated till long, long after. There is perhaps a natural liking in the femi-nine heart for all those little exhibitions of importance which the great crises of life make natural. To stand in the privileged position of those who are immersed in sorrow, yet not to be immersed in sorrow; to have all the consequence which is derived from fresh mourning and nearness to "a death;" yet to have the heart untouched, and no real trouble in it—this is something which pleases, which almost exhilarates in a somber way. It is so good to think that the death is not one which touches us, that we are only lightly moved by it, sitting in a voluntary gloom to please ourselves and compliment the other, not in the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Lady Penton in her way enjoyed all this, especially after her husband had gone. She put on her mourning, and made the girls dress themselves in the black frocks which had just come home, and then sitting down in the midst of them she too read the funeral service. It was very soothing, she said—all the more that she had so little real need of being soothed. The girls were full of awe and acquiescence; the new thought that some one had died, though it was only an old man, touched them, and the idea of all his death would bring

about increased the subduing, half-compunctious sentiment. It was not their fault that he had died, yet they

seemed somehow involved in it—almost to blame.

Little Mab put on a black frock also, though she had no intention of going into mourning, and made one of the little audience to whom the mother read the burial service. She was the spectator amid the group who felt themselves more immediately concerned, and it was all very strange to her-almost droll, it must be allowed. She was not wise enough to see how far the sentiment was real, and sprung out of the confused emotions of this critical period, and she was too sympathetic to pronounce that it was all false, which to a little woman of the world would have been the reasonable thing. She did not, in fact, at all understand these innocent people, though they were so easily understood. Her education made her look for motives in what they did; and they had no motives, but acted on the simple instinct of nature. Her keen little blue eyes, which were so child-like and full of laughter, scintillated with interest and the endeavor to understand. It was all so strange to her, so novel-the large family, the homely living, the community of feeling, everybody moving together, which was puzzling beyond description. She had seen so much of the world in her wealthy orphanhood, even though she was so young, that a sphere so simple and action so singleminded, were altogether beyond her understanding. She kept looking out for the secret, the rift within the lute, the point at which this unanimity would break up, but it did not appear. She had been taught a great deal about fortune-hunting, and the necessity of taking care of herself, and she had heard those side-whispers of society which can not escape the ears even of children—those insinuations of evil underneath and selfishness always rampant. She would not have been surprised had she found that Ally and Anne had schemes of their own, or their mother some deep-laid plan which nobody suspected. And when she found that there was nothing of the sort—so far, at least, as her keen inspection could find out-Mab was far more puzzled than if she had made any number of discoveries. There was but one particular in which she felt that there might be an opening into the unknown, and that was Walter—not, however, in the way in which she had been prepared for delinquency. He paid no attention to herself,

neither did any of the others make the faintest effort to put them in each other's way. There was certainly no fortunehunting in the case. But Mab felt that Walter's absences were not for nothing. She was astonished in her premature wisdom that no one took any note of them or seemed to mind. Perhaps there was a little pique in her soul. She had been interested in Walter, but he had shown no interest in her. She could not but think he would be much better employed making himself agreeable to the heiress whom fortune had thrown in his way than in involving himself in some clandestine love-making, which she felt sure was the case—some entanglement probably in the village, to which he seemed always to be going. What could be more silly? Mab had a strong practical tendency, perhaps drawn from the father who had made his own way so effectively. She felt vexed with Walter for this throwing away of his chances. Looking at the subject with perfect impartiality, she could not but feel that a young man coming into an encumbered property-or, at least, what was just the same as an encumbered property—to neglect the fortune which, for anything he knew, lay ready to his hand, was a mingled weakness and absurdity of the most obvious description. She did not enter into the question whether she herself would be disposed to assent or not. That was her own business, and not his. But that he should be so blind as not to try! And in the meantime she observed them all with wonder, and looked at their grave faces when they put themselves thus in sympathy with old Sir Walter's burial with a little cynical disposition to laugh, which it took her some trouble to restrain.

It was amusing—it might even be said ridiculous—when Lady Penton, the little ceremonial being over and an hour or so of quiet having elapsed, drew up all the blinds again solemnly with her own hands, going from window to win-

dow.

"They will have got back to Penton by this time," she said, in a tone perceptibly more cheerful. "You can tell Mary to take the children out for their walk; by this time it will be all over. And the affairs of life must go on, whatever happens," she added, with a little sigh. The sigh was for the trouble over, the cheerfulness for

The sigh was for the trouble over, the cheerfulness for the life to come. They were both quite simple and true. She herself took a little walk afterward, still with much gravity, round the garden, in which Mab, in her character as a philosophical observer, took pains to accompany her.

"But you never knew Sir Walter Penton, did you?" she

asked.

"Yes, I knew him, but not well. We went there a few times when we were newly married. After the death of the sons they rather turned against Edward. It was a pity, but I never blamed them."

"Why should they have turned against him? it was not

his fault."

"My dear," said the gentle woman, quietly, "you are

not old enough to understand."

Mab looked at her with those keen little eyes, which twinkled and sparkled with curiosity, and which to the little girl's own apprehension were able to look through and through all those simple people. But even Mab was daunted by this gentle and undoubting superiority of experience.

Lady Penton resumed quietly, speaking more to herself than to her companion, "I hope she will not feel it now not too much to listen. I hope she may not prove more

proud than ever."

She shook her head as she went slowly along, and Mab could not divine what she was thinking. They went together to the bench under the poplar-tree, where the weathercock which was over the Penton stables caught the red gold of the westering sun, and blazed so that it looked like a sun itself, stretching brazen rays over the dark and leafless woods.

"Do you think she could be happy living anywhere

else?" Lady Penton said at last.

"She—who? Do you mean Aunt Gerald? Oh, yes, to be sure, when she knows it isn't hers. And my uncle hates it."

"Your uncle!" Lady Penton repeated. And then she said, after a time, "I don't think she could be happy in

any other house."

But what was meant by this, or whether the new mistress of Penton was glad that her predecessor should suffer, or if these words were said in sympathy, was what little Mab could not understand. She had to betake herself to an investigation of the sentiments of the others. It began a new chapter in her investigations when at last Sir Edward

and his son appeared in their sables, both very grave and preoccupied. The father went into the house with his wife; the son joined the youthful group about the door. But no one could be more unwilling to communicate than Walter proved himself. He stood like a hound held in and pulling at the leash—like a horse straining against the curb. ("If you were to give him his head how he would go!" Mab said to herself.) But he did not break loose as she expected him to do. Impatient as he was, he stood still, with now and then a glance at the western sky. The sunset was a long time accomplishing itself. Was that what he was so impatient for?"

I suppose there was a wonderful crowd of people,

"Yes, there were a great many people."

"Everybody—that was anybody—"

"Everybody, whether they were anybody or not."
"And were there a great many flowers? and did our

wreath look nice? was it as big as the others?"

"There were heaps of flowers; ours didn't show one way or another. How could you expect it among such a lot?"

"But you were the chief mourners, Wat!"

"Yes, we were the chief mourners. I wish you wouldn't ask me so many questions. Just because we were the chief mourners I saw next to nothing."
"Did Cousin Alicia go?"

"How do you suppose she could go-to have all those people staring?"

But did you see her?—did you see anybody? Did

"Oh, don't bother me," Walter cried. "Don't you see

I have enough to think of without that!"

"What has he to think of, I wonder?" said Mab to her-self, gazing at him with her keen eyes. But the girls were silent, half respectful of the mysterious unknown things which he might now have to think of, half subdued by the presence of the looker-on, before whom they could not let it be supposed that Wat was less than perfect. And presently, after moving about a little, saying scarcely anything, he disappeared in-doors. Was it to the book-room, to look over his Greek? or was it to steal out by the other door and hurry once more to the village? It was there Mab felt sure

that he always went. To the village—meaning doubtless

to some girl there, of whose existence nobody knew.

Sir Edward took his wife in-doors, solemnly leading her by the hand, and when they got to the book-room he put a chair for her solemnly. Already his old breeding—too fine for the uses of every day at the Hook—began to come back to him.

"I have not been successful," he said. "It will not do." It will not do? She won't take it from you, Edward?"

"There is no reason why she shouldn't take it from me; but she will not hear of it. I have done all I could, my dear. There is nothing more possible. We can go in when we like; they will put no obstacles in our way."

"Go in when we like—and how are we to furnish Pen-

ton?" she cried.

"And keep it up," he said, with a groan; "there are literally acres of glass—and to see the gardeners going away in the evening it is like a factory. But we can not help it. I have done my best. By the bye," he added, in something of his old aggrieved tone, "they have behaved what I suppose will be called very handsomely in another way. I told you my uncle's fancy about Walter—they have given him ten thousand pounds."

"What?" she said, almost with a scream.

"Walter—he took my uncle's fancy; didn't I tell you? He is to have ten thousand pounds. It's a good sum, but nothing to them; they are very rich; what with all the savings of the estate, and the money in the funds, and the lands elsewhere that are out of the entail, Alicia's very rich. They can afford it; but all the same, it's a nice sum."

"Ten thousand pounds," she repeated to herself. She had not remarked the rest. A sort of consternation of pleasure overwhelmed her. "It is very good of them, Edward, oh, very good. Why, Walter will be independent. Ten thousand pounds! Oh, dear me, what a good that would have done us—how much we should have thought of it! Ten thousand pounds! And what does he say?"

"Nothing, so far as I remarked. I was not thinking of him," said Sir Edward, with a little impatience. He had so much to think of in respect to the family at large and all the cares of the new life, that he was a little annoyed to have Walter thrust into the front at such a moment. "Of course it is a great thing for him," he said. "It would

have been a great thing for us at this moment to have command of a sum of money. My uncle might have thought of that. He might have thought that to change our style of living as we shall be obliged to do, to set up an establishment on a totally different scale, to alter everything, a little ready money would have been a great help; whereas Walter has no use for it, no need of it, a boy of twenty. But there is no limit to the fantastic notions of old men with money to leave.'

"You forget," said his wife, "that old Sir Walter intended everything to be different—that he never meant us

to set up an establishment or live in Penton at all."

"Ah, the question is, did he mean that—wasn't it merely a plan of Alicia's? Oh, no, I've heard nothing more. But I can't help thinking my uncle would really have preferred having a family to continue the old name after him, instead of letting it all run into the Russell family, as I suppose it must have done. That reminds me, I have a message for that little Russell girl. Russell Penton will come for her or send for her to-morrow. He made all sorts of pretty speeches about our kindness in taking her in."

"Dear me, it was not worth talking about. It was Ally's idea. One little thing more in our house—what does it matter? She is a nice little thing; she gives no trouble," said Lady Penton, to whom little Mab was of no

importance at all.

Sir Edward dismissed the subject with a wave of his hand. It was of still less importance to him than it was to his wife. He said, "They are going abroad I believe very soon. Those people to whom money is no object always fly abroad to get quit of every annoyance. When shall you and I be able to run off, Annie, for a rest? Never, I fear."

"Well, Edward," she said, quietly, "if we were able in one way we shouldn't be in another. We couldn't leave the children, you know. I shouldn't wonder if the Russell Pentons would willingly change with us—their money against our children. They have the worst of it after all; so much to leave and nobody belonging to them to leave it to. So we must not grumble."

This view of the case did not appear to give Sir Edward much comfort. He seated himself at his table and drew his writing things toward him. It was only to begin once

more those inevitable calculations which had a charm yet,

did not make anything easier.

"If you have got anything to do," he said, "I'll not keep you longer." He added, as she went toward the door, "Don't make any fuss about Walter. He ought to understand that this makes no difference;" and again, turning round, calling her, "Annie, don't forget to tell the little Russell girl."

She went out into the garden, where the girls were still wandering about in the restlessness of spent excitement. It did not occur to her to keep back her news because of "the little Russell girl." They all came round her, Mab keeping behind a little, yet following the others. The day was very mild, and Lady Penton had a shawl round her shoulders, but no covering on her head.

"Your father is rather disappointed," she said. "Your cousin Alicia will not accept what we offered. I am sorry,

but we must just make up our minds to it."

"Make up our minds to Penton!" cried Anne.

"Oh, my dear, so far as that is concerned! but you know how difficult it will be. However, there is something else that will please you very much. You know old Sir Walter at the last took a great fancy to our Wat, and wanted to leave him something. Well, your cousin Alicia felt she ought to carry out her father's wishes, and she has settled on him a fortune-ten thousand pounds."

"Ten thousand pounds!" said the girls, in one breath.

"It makes him quite independent. It is a great thing for him at his age; I hope it will not lead him into temptation. And it is very good of your cousin Alicia. She had no need to do it unless she pleased, for it was only a fancy, a dying fancy, which Sir Walter, perhaps, had he got better, might not— We must always be grateful to her, whatever else may happen. Few people, though they might be very civil, would show kindness to that extent.' Lady Penton paused thoughtfully. Cousin Alicia had not been on the whole very civil, and she felt as if the thanks she was according were not enthusiastic enough. "It is a wonderful thing," she added, warming herself up, "an absolute gift of ten thousand pounds. I don't think I ever heard of anything like it. It is a splendid gift."

"And Wat never said a word! I wonder, mother, if he

knows."

"Yes, he knows. I dare say he was overwhelmed by it. He would not know what to say. Where is he? I should

like to wish him joy."

"I know where he is. He has gone to the village to tell her," said little Mab to herself, and she looked the other way in case Lady Penton might have read it in her eyes. But Lady Penton, in her innocence, never would have divined what those eyes meant. And presently she carried the war, so to speak, into the enemy's country by turning

next to her visitor.
"My dear," she said, "there is a message for you, too. Mr. Russell Penton is to send for you, or perhaps come for

you, to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" cried Mab, taken by surprise. While she was thus keeping back her sheaf of imaginary arrows, here was one which caught herself as it were in the very middle of her shield. "Oh!" she cried again, "and must I co?"

I go?"

Now she had been no inconsiderable embarrassment to the family at this crisis of its affairs, but the moment she uttered this little plaintive cry all their soft hearts turned to Mab with a bound of tenderness and gratitude, and great compunction for ever having found her in their way. They did not know that part of her reluctance to leave them was in consequence of the investigations which she had entered upon, and was by no means willing to break

"My dear," said Lady Penton, "we have been so out of our ordinary while you have been with us, that I am sure it is very, very sweet of you to care to stay. And we should all like very much to keep you a little longer. I hope Mr. Russell Penton may come for you himself tomorrow, and then perhaps he will consent to let you stay." of the rest of the state of the second of th

CHAPTER XXXI.

A VISIT. THESE communications were interrupted by the sound of carriage-wheels so near that it was not possible to escape the certainty that visitors were approaching. Lady Penton paused for a moment, discussing with herself whether she should say "Not at home," the day of the funeral was

very early to receive visitors; but then she reflected that they had all got their mourning-even Martha having her black gown-and that there was therefore no reason why she should not receive, though "they," whoever they were, would have shown better taste had they postponed their visit. However, in this afternoon of excitement and désoeuvrement, it was almost a relief to see somebody who was not concerned, and might consequently impart something new-a little change into the atmosphere. The carriage which came wheeling round past the drawing-room windows was new and glistening, and highly effective, much more so than is usually to be met with in the country: and out of it came two ladies, as carefully got-up as their vehicle, wrapped in furs and plush. That peeps were taken at them from the corner where a judicious observer could see without being seen it is almost unnecessary to say.

"No, I don't know them," said Anne, shaking her head. "It is none of the Bannister people, nor the Miltons, nor the Durhams, nor anybody I ever saw. They must be from the other side, or else they are Reading people, or-"

"We know no Reading people," said Lady Penton, with a tone—well, perhaps it was not pride; but certainly it was a tone which would not have come naturally to Mrs. Penton of the Hook one short week before.

"The footman is opening the door—he has such a delightful fur cape on! They're coming in. Ally, look, look! Dd you ever see them before?"

Ally had held back, not liking to show her curiosity before little Mab, that critic and investigator whom she began instinctively to divine. But she made a little soft movement forward now. And when she saw the ladies stepping out of the carriage Ally gave vent to a startled cry, "Oh!" which showed she was not so ignorant as her sister. Lady Penton turned toward her for explanation, but it was already too late. The door was thrown open by Martha with more demonstration than when she was only parlor-maid to Mrs. Penton. The shadow of a title upon her head changed even Martha. She announced "Mrs. Rochford, my. lady!" in a voice such as no one in the Hook had ever heard before.

"Rochford?" said Lady Penton, with a wondering question in her voice, looking at Ally, who seemed to know. It was not in her nature to be otherwise than polite. She

stepped forward and accepted the visitor's outstretched hand, and gave her a seat, but without any of the tremulous shyness of former days. She had taken up the rôle of great lady with less difficulty than could have been anticipated. Mrs. Rochford was large and ample in her furs. She would have made three of Lady Penton; and the muff in which one of her hands was folded was worth more than all that the other lady had to wear. Nevertheless, Lady Penton, simple as she sat there, felt herself so entirely Mrs. Rochford's social superior that this outside splendor of appearance was altogether neutralized. Perhaps the visitor was a little confused by this, for she made another step beyond the mistress of the house and seized upon Ally with both her hands out and a great deal of enthusiasm.

"Dear Miss Penton, how are you after all this agitation?" she said, in the most sypmathetic tone, and looked as if she would have kissed Ally, who blushed crimson, and evidently did not know how to respond; and then it was the turn of Miss Rochford, who was effusive and sympa-

"The dear child," said Mrs. Rochford, seating herself, "looked a little lost at Penton at the ball. She had never been out before, I am sure, without you, Lady Pentonwhich makes such a difference to a sensitive girl. I quite took it upon me to be her chaperon. And then I think she oiteavar bas on enjoyed herself."

'Oh!" said Lady Penton, with a blank look; and then she added, "So much has happened since that I have heard

nothing about the ball."

"Yes, indeed," said the other, in the most sympathetic tone. "Such wonderful changes in so short a time! and just when we were all thinking that poor dear Sir Walter might live to be a hundred." Then she remembered that this was not an event which the Pentons at the Hook would naturally have found desirable. "But I always say," added the lady, "that it is such a comfort when an old gentleman of that age goes out of life in tolerable comfort without suffering. Sometimes they have so much to go through. It seems so mysterious."

Meanwhile, Miss Rochford, a pretty but much-curled and frizzed girl of the period, seized upon Ally. "Oh, I've wanted so much to come and see you. Mamma said we

oughtn't to, that you were much greater people now. But you were so nice at the ball, and looked so pleased to be with us, I felt sure you wouldn't mind. Wasn't it a delightful ball? But you who were in the house must have felt all that dreadful business about old Sir Walter dying. It was very dreadful, of course; but what a good thing he waited till the ball was over. Had it happened only a little sooner there would have been no ball. Is that your sister? are they both your sisters? Oh!" This exclamation followed when Mab turned round and revealed to the visitor the features of the heiress who had been pointed out to everybody at the Penton ball.

"This is my sister Anne, but she wasn't at Penton. And this is Miss Russell," said Ally, who did not know much about the formulas of introduction, and who was considerably startled by the recollection that the Rochfords had been her protectors at Penton, which even she, simple as she was, felt to be inappropriate now. Mab made the newcomer a very dignified little bow. She knew everything of this kind much better than the others did, and knew very

well who the Rochfords were.

"My son has told me so often about your charming family and how kind you were to him; and after meeting Miss Penton, as there seemed then a sort of double connection, I thought I might take it upon me to call."

"Oh, you are very kind," Lady Penton said.

"My son does nothing but talk of Penton Hook. He is so charmed with everything here. And he is not easily pleased. He is a great favorite in the county, don't you know? He is invited everywhere. I told him at his age it is enough to turn his head altogether. But he is very true; he is not led away by finery. I find that he always prefers what is really best."

"Yes," said Lady Penton; "we saw Mr. Rochford several times. He used to come about the business which un-

fortunately was not completed."

"Do you say unfortunately? He supposed you would

rather be pleased."

"I am not at all pleased," said Lady Penton, drawing back into the stronghold of her dignity. "It is always a pity when family arrangements can not be carried out." I am sure, 'said Mrs. Rochford, in her most ingrati-

"I am sure," said Mrs. Rochford, in her most ingratiating tones, "the county will like far better to see you there than Mrs. Russell Penton. Not that there is anything disagreeable in Mrs. Russell Penton. She is everything that is nice; but it is always more or less a false position, don't you think? and, on the other hand, a young family is always cheerful and popular."

"I don't know how that may be. We are really more a

nursery-party than anything else."

"Oh, don't say so, Lady Penton! with those two charm-

The mother's eye followed the wave of the visitor's hand, and she could not but feel that there was truth in this. She had not thought of Ally and Anne from this point of They were not beauties, she was aware. Still, looking at them as they were now, a thrill of that satisfaction and complacency which is at once the most entirely unselfish and the most egotistical of sentiments warmed her bosom. She felt, contrasting them with the somewhat artificial neatness of the Rochford young lady, and the bluntness of little Mab on the other hand, that they might very well be called charming girls. She had rarely had creatures of the same species to compare them with.

"They are very young," she said, "and we have had little opportunity to do anything for them; they are not at all acquainted with the world."

"And that is such a charm, I always think! When my son brought Miss Penton to us the other night she had that look of wanting her mother which is so sweet. Mrs. Penton of course had all her guests to look to, and the anxiety about her father. I was so happy to take your dear girl under my motherly wing. It is broad enough," said Mrs. Rochford, raising a little the arm which was clothed in sealskin and beaver, or in something else more costly than these, if there is anything more costly, and which indeed had an air of softness and warmth which was pleasant. She was what is called a motherly woman, large and caressing, and really kind. She might perhaps have found the courage to keep a poor girl at "a proper distance" had her son been in danger, but otherwise in all probability would have been kind to Ally even had she not been Miss Penton of Penton. And in that case would have taken no credit for it, such as in the present she felt it expedient to insist upon.

"You will be going nowhere in your mourning," said

Miss Rochford to Ally, "it will be so dull for you just at this time of the year. I do so wish you would come to us a little. We don't give parties, not often; but there is always something going on. Mamma is very good, she never minds the trouble. And Charley is the very best of brothers, he is always trying to keep us amused. Now if you would come there's nothing he wouldn't do. We could give you a mount if you hunt. My sister doesn't ride. I should be so happy to have another girl to go out with me. Oh, do come. And if the frost holds there will be skating. You will have to be quiet, of course, at home for the sake of your mourning, but with us you needn't mind. Oh, do! It would be so delightful to have you. Charley was very despondent about it. He thought you would be so much too grand for us, who are only Reading people, but I said I was sure you were not one to forget old friends."

"Too grand!" cried Ally, turning red. "Oh, no, no." It was not surely that she was too grand. Still there was something—a sentiment of repugnance, a drawing back which, if it was that, was the meanest sentiment, she

thought, in the world.

"No, I am sure not," said Miss Ethel Rochford.

knew you were not one to throw over old friends."

Were they old friends? She was very much puzzled by this question. It seemed so ungracious to make any exception to a claim made with such kindness and enthusiasm. But Ally did not know what answer to make when the ladies at length had rustled away back to their carriage, still very caressing and cordial, but somewhat disappointed, since Lady Penton, with a firmness not at all in keeping with her character, had declined the invitation to Ally.

"Are you such great friends with these people?" asked Anne, before the sealskin had quite swept out of the door; and, "Were you so much with them at the ball?" said Lady Penton, sitting down, and turning her mild eyes upon her daughter with great seriousness. Poor Ally felt as if

she were a culprit at the bar.

"They were very kind," she said, with a look of great humility at her mother. "I never saw them except that one time; but they were very kind."

"You have never told me anything about the ball, there have been so many other things to think of. I ought to have remembered, my poor little Ally, you would be very forlorn without me or some one; but then I thought your cousin Alicia— Didn't you have any dancing then? Didn't you enjoy yourself at all?"

"She danced all the evening," said Mab; "I saw her. I

never could get near her to say a word."

"Then what does this lady mean?" the mother said.

Poor Ally was very nearly crying with distress and shame, though there was nothing to be ashamed about. Oh, yes! there was cause for shame, and she felt it. 'She had been very thankful for Mrs. Rochford's notice. She had been thankful to meet him, to feel herself at once transformed from the neglected little poor relation, whom no one noticed, to the admired and petted little heroine of the other set, who were not the great people, and yet who looked just as well as the great people, and danced as well, and were as well dressed, and so much more kind. And now she felt ashamed of it all-of them and him, and all the people who had made the evening so pleasant. She did not like to tell her story-how she had been neglected, and how she had been admired, and the comfort the Rochford set had been to her, and now that she was ashamed of them all-for that was the conclusion which she could not disguise from herself. Now that she was Sir Edward Penton's daughter, now that she herself was to be the first at Penton, she was ashamed to have known nobody but the Rochfords, and she was ashamed of being ashamed. The family solicitor, that was all—a sort of official person, whose duty it was to take a little notice of her, not to let her feel herself neglected, whom she had been so glad to cling to. And now? There was no word of contempt that Ally did not heap upon herself. She was not sure if girls were ever called "snobs," but this she was sure of, that if so, then a snob was what she was.

"Mother, they're both true," she said. "It was—oh, dreadful at first! I didn't know any one. I knew some of them by sight, but that was all. And nobody spoke to me. I should have liked to go through the floor or run away, but I hadn't the courage. And then I saw him—I mean Mr. Rochford, you know, who has been so often here. And he asked me to dance; and when he saw I had no one to go to, took me to his mother. And they were so kind; and I enjoyed myself very much after that. But—"

said Ally, and stopped short.

Oh, odious little traitor that she was! But she could not say what was in her heart besides, which was—oh, horrible snebbishness, miserableness, unworthiness!—that she never wished to see these good Samaritans any more.

"When I return her call I must thank her for being so kind to you," said Lady Penton, with a cloudy counte-

nance.

And this was all she said. Nor was there any further conversation on the subject-none, at least, which Mab heard. She had her own theory on the subject, and formed her little history at once, which was founded on Ally's faint little emphasis, "I saw him." "Him" Mab decided to be a lover, whom, now that the Pentons had risen in the world, the family would no longer permit to be spoken of, but whom Ally favored in secret, and to whom she had given her heart. It was a mistake which was very natural. -the most usual thing in the world. Mab decided that it was a great blunder for the mother and sisters to interfere. What could they do? except to put the other party on their guard? Our comprehensions are limited by our experiences. To understand the state of mind in which Ally was-the repugnance she felt toward the people whom she had liked so much, and who had been so kind to her, and her disgust at herself for that other disgust which she could not conquer-was what no one at Penton Hook was the least able at Continue that bettern in water water that the he visor

CHAPTER XXXII.

WALTER: AND HIS FATE.

Walter had darted off to the village as Mab divined; but what was the good? He might get himself talked of, wandering about Crockford's cottage; but there was no one there who would compromise herself for him. He had to go home again for the evening meal as before, but this time with more impatience than before, with a stronger sense that the bondage was insupportable. Walter would have been furiously indignant had it been said to him that the fact of having or not having money of his own would change his deportment toward his family; but yet it was the case, notwithstanding all he could have said. He felt himself a different being from the docile boy who had to do

what was decided for him, to go to Oxford or wherever his father pleased. This morning, no further back, that had been all he thought of. There was nothing else possibleto do what was told him-what was arranged and settled for him-what father and mother after one of their consultations had decided was the best. Walter would no more have thought of resisting that decision at twenty than Horry would at nine. But a day brings so many changes with it. He was not now what he had been when he passed the cottage with his father on his way to Sir Walter's funeral. Now he was no longer dependent; he could stand by himself. It seemed absurd to him that he should have to be punctual to an hour, that he should be bound by all the customs of the house. Already he had felt the absurdity of going home-home from his romance, from his drama, from love and devotion on a heroic scale—to tea! Now he had gone a little further even than this. He was independent, he had a fortune of his own, no need to depend upon his father for everything as he had been doing. And he had come to an age and to circumstances which not only justified, but made it necessary that he should act for himself. Nevertheless, he was not even now prepared to break the bond of the old habits. He went back as before for the family meal, then escaping, once more hurried through the night to the scene which was ever in his thoughts. The moon was later of rising, the night was not so clear and frosty as on that other evening, when he had surprised her with the other lover, the man who had roused such fury in his breast. Since then they had met every evening, and Walter no longer feared that vulgar rival. They had no secrets from each other now. She had told him everything, or so he thought, about that other; how he had persecuted her to marry him, notwithstanding the opposition of his parents, who were very rich, and did not think her good enough—how she had come here to be out of his reach -and how she feared now that he had discovered her hidingplace he would give her no peace. She had confessed frankly that before she met Walter she had not "minded" the other. He was well off, he could give her a home; and if she had not met Walter she might have been happy enough; but now, never. The boy's heart was penetrated by this sweet confession; his boyish love sprung up all at once into a chivalrous and generous passion. He had

talked to her vaguely, splendidly, of what they could do. If, as seemed inevitable, his studies must be accomplished, why then they must be married at once, casting prudence to the winds, and he must find a little nook at Oxford where they could live like babes in the wood-like Rosamond in her bower. Yes, that was it—like Rosamond, with a flowery labyrinth all round her cottage, from whence he should come every morning with his books, and return when his work was over to love and happiness. The picture had been beautiful, but vague, and she had listened and laughed a little, now and then putting a practical question which confused but did not daunt the young man. How were they to live. What was enough for one, would not that be enough for two, he asked? and he cared for nothing, no pleasure, no luxury, but her sweet company. She let him talk, and perhaps enjoyed it; at least it amused her; it was like a fairy tale.

But to-night—to-night! there were other things to say. The foolish boy caught her arm and drew it within his as soon as she appeared. "Are you warm, are you comfortable?" he whispered. "I have so much to tell you; everything is changed. You must not hurry in again in a moment, there is so much to say."

"What is changed? If you have tired of your romancing

that would be the best thing," she said.

"I shall never tire of my romancing. It is all coming right; everything is clearing up. It will be almost too easy. The course of true love this time will be quite smooth."

"Ah, that's what I like," she cried, "but how is it to be? You don't mean to say that your father and mother

-they would never be such fools-,,

"Fools!" he cried, pressing her arm to his side; "they're not fools, but they know nothing about it; it is something—something that has happened to me."

"I am glad," she said, composedly, "that you have not told them; it would be a wild thing to do. And I know what young men's parents are; they will sometimes pretend to consent to set you against it—they think that if there is no opposition it will die away of itself."

"It will never die away," he said, "opposition or no

"It will never die away," he said, "opposition or no opposition; but, Emmy, it isn't a penniless fellow that

you're going to marry. We sha'n't have to live on my little bit of an allowance—I've got—money of my own."

She gave a little suppressed scream of pleasure.

"Money of your own!"

"Yes; that has nothing to do with my father; that nobody can interfere with. It comes from my old relative, old Sir Walter. He has left me ten thousand pounds."

"Ten thousand pounds!" she repeated, with a quickly drawn breath, then paused a little; "that is a very nice sum of money. I am very glad you've got all that. How much will it bring in by the year?"

He was a little checked in his enthusiasm by this inquiry; and, to tell the truth, it was not a question he had consid-

ered or knew very well how to answer.

"You might get five hundred a year for it if you were very very lucky; but I don't think," she said, "you will

get so much as that."

"At all events," he said, somewhat sobered, "it will be my own; it will be something I can spend as I please, and with which nobody will have any right to interfere. We could have existed perhaps on my allowance; but it would have been hard upon my darling cooping her up in a small cottage, with scarcely money enough to live upon—"

He thought perhaps she would interrupt him here, and cry out, as he himself would have done, what did that matter, so long as they were together? But she did not do

this. She was quite silent, waiting for him to go on.

"But now," he continued, "it will be different. We can enjoy ourselves a little. I don't suppose we shall be rich even now."

"No," she said, quietly, "you will not be rich."

He turned and looked into her face, but in the darkness he could see nothing. And then he was used to these little prudential ways she had, and the superior knowledge

which she claimed of the world.

"Perhaps not rich, but well off, don't you think?" he said, with a little timidity, "to begin upon; and then there would be Penton in the distance. Penton is a noble place. All the time of the ball I was thinking of you, how you would have liked it, and how much more beautiful it would have been had you been there. We must give a ball some time, when we come home—"

"You mean," she said, for he made a pause, "when

3-2d half.

you succeed; but your father is not an old man, and that

may be a long, long time."

"I hope so," said Walter, fervently; "loving you makes me love everybody else better. I hope it may be a long, long time. The blow eds are on was of the

Again she made no remark—which she might have done, perhaps saying she hoped so too; but no doubt she thought

it unnecessary to say what was so certain and evident.

"But," he cried, pressing her arm again closer to his side, "I didn't mean anything so lugubrious, I meant when I brought you home. That will be a triumph, darling! They will put up arches for us, and come out to meet us. It shall be a summer evening, not cold like this. We shall have a pair of white horses fit for a bride, though you will be a little more than a bride by that time, Emmy?"

"Shall I?" she said, with a tone of mockery in her

laugh.

"Why, of course," he cried, bending over her, "since it is winter now! You don't suppose it is to be put off so long. Why, you say yourself you are a will-o'-the-wisp. You would have disappeared by that time if I left you to yourself.' are; he has mo

"That's true enough," she said, with another soft suppressed laugh, which made him turn and look at her again, for there seemed a meaning in it more than met the

ear.

"Don't laugh so," he said, softly. "It sounds as if you would like to wring my heart, only for the fun of it; but it would be no fun to me."

"Did I?" said she. "No, it is you who are making

fun."

"It is not a thing to laugh about," cried the boy. "It is tremendous beautiful earnest to me. But I was talking of the coming home. My people would never say a word when they knew it was done, Emmy, and that you and I were one. They might object perhaps before, not knowing you. I am not even sure of that when they knew how I cared for you. Father might; but mother would be on my side."

"No," she said, "don't tell me that; I am sure they

are not so silly, your mother, above all."
"Do you call that silly? Well, I think she is silly then, dear old mother!" cried the young man, with his voice a

little unsteady. Walter felt to the bottom of his heart what he had said to his unresponsive companion, that in loving her he loved them all so much better. The faculty of loving seemed to have expanded in him. He had not an unkind feeling to any one in the world, except perhaps to that fellow—no, not even to him, poor beggar, who was losing her. To lose her was such a misfortune as made even that cad an object of pity to gods and men.

"And how is all this to come about?" she said, after a pause. "It's easy talking about what's to happen in summer, and coming home to Penton, and all that sort of thing—but in the meantime there are a few things to be

done. How is it all to come about?"

"Our marriage?" he said. Adv to may a said Hada off

"Well, yes, I suppose that's the first step," she an-

"That is the easiest thing in the world," said Wat. "I shall go to town and arrange all the preliminaries. Why, what did you tell me that fellow wanted to do? Do you

think I'm less fit to manage it than he is?"

"Well," she said, "for one thing, he's older than you are; he has more freedom than you have. He knows his way about the world. Will they let you go to London by yourself, for one thing?" she asked, with again that mocking sound in her voice.

Walter caught her arm to his side with a kind of fond

fury, and cried, "Emmy!" in an indignant voice.

"I shouldn't if I were your people," she continued, with a laugh; "I should feel sure you would be up to some mischief. But, supposing you get off from them, and get to London, what will you do then?"

"I shall do—whatever is the right thing to do. I am not so foolish as you think me. There is a license to be

got, I know—a special license."

"Oh," she cried, "but that costs money! You will

want money."

"Of course I shall want money," said Walter, with a certain dignity, though his heart grew cold at the thought. "You have not much confidence in me, Emmy; but I am not so ignorant as you think."

There was something like a tone of indignation in his

voice, and she pressed his arm with her hand.

"I am sure you have the courage for anything," she said.

"Courage! Well, that is not precisely the quality that is needed." He thought it was his turn to laugh now. "I am not afraid."

"I know you are not afraid of fighting or-anything of that kind. But to walk into an office, and face a man who is grinning at you all the time, and ask for a marriage license-",

"Well," he said, "I am capable of that."

"And of all the questions that will be asked you? You will have to answer a great many questions-all about me, which you don't know, and all about yourself."

"I know that, I hope. And I shall know the other, for

you will tell me."

"And first of all-goodness!" she cried suddenly, pushing him slightly away from her, gazing at him in the darkness; "a thing I never thought of—are you of age?"

"Of age?"

He stood facing her, motionless. He had put out his hand to take hers again, to draw it through his arm once more. But this question startled him, and his hand dropped by his side. Each stood a dark shadow to the other in the dark, staring into each other's faces, seeing nothing; and Walter's heart gave a jump that seemed to take it out of his breast.

"Yes, of age. Oh, you fool! oh, you pretender! oh, you boy trying to be a man! You have known it all along, but you have not told me. You are not of age?"

"No," said the poor boy, humbly. For the first moment he felt no sensation of anger or disappointment, but only the consternation of one who feels the very sky thundering down upon his head, the pillars of the earth falling. "Fool!" did she call him-" pretender!" What did she mean by fool? What did she mean by that tone of sudden indignation—almost fury? He felt beaten down by the sudden storm. Then the instinct of self-defense woke in "What have I done?" he said. "I have concealed nothing from you. No, I am not of age-not till October. What has that to do with it;—age can not be counted by mere years."

"It is, though, in Doctors' Commons," she said, with a mocking laugh. "We might have saved ourselves a great deal of trouble and talking nonsense if you had said so at once. Didn't I tell you you were too young to know what

was wanted? Do you think they will give any kind of li-cense to a boy who is under age!"

"I am not a boy," said Walter, feeling as if she had struck him upon the naked heart, which was throbbing so wildly. "Perhaps I might be before I knew you, but not now, not now! And do you mean to tell me that for a mere punctilio like that—"

"Well, it is a punctilio," she said, taking his arm sud-denly again, her voice dropping into its softer tone. "That is true; nobody thinks anything of it, it is merely a matter of form. Even if you are found out they never do any-

thing to you."

"Found out in what?"

"In saying you are twenty-one when you are not; for that is what people have to do. It is just a punctilio, as you say. Nobody thinks anything of it. It is only a matter of form."

"Why, it is perjury!" he cried, confused, not knowing

what he said.

"If you like to call it so; but nobody minds. No one is harsh to a fib of that sort. Everything's fair, don't you

know, in love?-or so they say."

Walter's head seemed going round and round. He could not feel the ground under his feet. He seemed to be lifted away from his firm and solid footing and plunged into a dark and whirling abyss. He could feel her leaning almost heavily upon his arm-all her weight upon him, both her hands clasping that support. That palpable touch seemed the only reality left in earth and heaven. He seemed to himself for a long time unable to speak; and when his voice came forth at last it was not his voice at all-it was a hoarse outburst of sound such as he had never heard before. Nor was it he who said the words. He heard them as if some one else had said them, hoarse, harsh, like the cry of an animal.

"Should you like me to do that?" the question was asked by some one, in that horrible way, in the midst of the

chilled but heavenly stillness of the night.

He heard the question, but he was not conscious of any answer to it; nor did he know any more till he found himself, or rather heard himself, stumbling down the steep road to the Hook, almost falling over the stones in the way, making a noise which seemed to echo all about. He

knew the way well enough, and where the stony places were, and generally ran up and down as lightly as a bird, his rapid elastic steps making the least possible sound as he skimmed along. But this evening it was very different. He stumbled against every obstacle in his way, and sent the stones whirling down the road in advance of him as though he had been a drunken man. He felt indeed as if that were what he was, intoxicated in a way that had no pleasure in it, but only a wild and stupefied confusion, which made a chaos all around—a noisy chaos full of the crash of external sounds—full of voices, conversations, in none of which he took any part, though he heard things said that seemed to come from himself flitting across the surface of his dream.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A DOMESTIC EXPLOSION.

THE breakfast-table at the Hook was not a particularly quiet scene. The children were all in high spirits in the freshness of the morning, and the toys and Christmas presents, though not very fine or expensive, had still novelty to recommend them. Little Molly, before she was lifted up to her high-chair, working away conscientiously and gravely with a large rattle, held at the length of her little arm, while her next little brother drew over the carpet a cart fitted up with some kind of mechanism which called itself music; and Horry flogged his big wooden horse, and little Dick added a boom upon his drum, made a combination of noises which might well have shut out all external sounds. This tumult, indeed, calmed when father came in, when the ringleaders were lifted up on their chairs, and another kind of commotion, the sound of spoons and babble of little voices, began. What other noise could be heard through it? Mab did not think she could have heard anything, scarcely the approach of an army. But the ears of the family were used to it, and had large capabilities. When Martha came in with a fresh supply of milk and a countenance more ruddy than usual, her mistress put the question directly which so much embarrassed the young woman. "Martha, was that your father's voice I heard? Is there

anything wrong at home?"

"No, ma'am-my lady," said Martha, in her confusion stumbling over the new title which she was in fact more particular about than its possessor.

"What does he want, then, so early in the morning? I

hope your mother is not ill?"
Oh, no, my lady." Martha grew redder and redder, and lingered like a messenger who does not know how to deliver a disagreeable commission, turning her tray round and round in her hands.

"It is me, no doubt, that Crockford wants. If it's noth-

ing very particular he can come here."

"Oh, no, sir; oh, please, Sir Edward, no, it ain't you-" "Then who is it, Martha? some one here it must be."

"Please, Sir Edward!—please, my lady—I don't think as it's no one here at all; it's only a fancy as he's took in his head. Oh," cried the girl, her eyes moist with excitement, her plump cheeks crimson, "don't listen to him, don't give any heed to him! it's all just fancy what he says."

"Why, what's the matter, Martha? has John Baker got into trouble? Edward, go and see what is wrong," said Lady Penton, placidly. She was very kind, but after all, Molly's bread and milk, and the egg which was ordered for little Jack because he was delicate, were of more immediate importance than Martha's love-affairs. Sir Edward was perhaps even more amiable in this respect than his wife. Old Crockford was a favorite in his way, and had often amused a weary afternoon when the horizon at the Hook was very limited and very dull. And now even Mab could hear, through the chatter of the children, the sound of some one talking, loud but indistinct, outside. At that moment, with the usual cruelty of fate, a pause took place in the domestic murmur, and suddenly Walter's voice became audible, crying,

"Hush! Don't speak so loud."

The door had been left ajar by Martha, and these words, so unexpected, so incomprehensible, fell into the simple warm interior, unconscious of evil, like a stone into the water.

"Go and see what it is, Edward," Lady Penton repeated, growing a little pale. The family to which for so long a time nothing had happened had got to a crisis, when anything might happen, and new events were the order of

the day.

Sir Edward, who had been going with great composure, hurried his steps a little, and, what was more, closed the door behind him; but it can not be said that he anticipated anything disagreeable. When he got out into the hall, however, he was startled by the sight of Walter, who was pushing Crockford into the book-room, and repeating in a half whisper,

"Hush, I tell you. Be quiet. What good can it do

you to let everybody know?"

"It's right, Mr. Walter, as your father should know."

"Not if I satisfy you," said the boy. "Come in here. They are all at breakfast. Quick. Whatever it is, I am the person-"

Walter's voice broke off short, and his under-lip dropped with a shock of sudden horror. His father's hand, preventing the closing of it, was laid upon the book-room door.

"If it is anything that concerns you, Wat, it must concern me too," Sir Edward said. He did not even now think any more of Walter's possibilities of ill-doing than of Horry's. They were still on about the same level to the father's eyes. He supposed it was some innocent piece of mischief, some practical joke, or, at the worst, some piece of boyish negligence, of which Crockford had come to complain. He followed the two into the room with the suspicion of a smile at the corners of his mouth. He did not quite understand of what mischief his son might have been guilty, but there could be nothing very serious in the matter when old Crockford was the complainant.

"Well," he said, "old friend, what has my boy done?" But the sight of Sir Edward and this smiling accost seemed to take the power of speech from Crockford, as well as from Walter. The old man opened his mouth and his eyes; the color faded as far as that was possible out of the streaky and broken red of his cheeks. He began to hook his fingers together, changing them from one twist to another as he turned his face from the father to the son. It was evident that, notwithstanding his half threat to Walter, the presence of Walter's father was as bewildering to him as to the young man.

"Well, sir," he said, instinctively putting up his hand to his head and disordering the scanty white locks which were drawn over his bald crown, "I'm one as is lookin' ahead, so being as I'm an old man, and has a deal of time to think; my occupation's in the open air, and things goes through of my head that mightn't go through of another man's."

"That is all very well," said Sir Edward, still with his half smile. "I have heard you say as much a great many times, Crockford, but it generally was followed by something less abstract. What has your occupation and your

habit of thought to say to my boy?"

Upon this Crockford scratched his head more and more. "I was observin' to Mr. Walter, sir, as a young gentleman don't think of them things, but as how it's a good thing to take care; for you never knows what way trouble's a-going to come. The storm may be in the big black cloud as covers the whole sky, or it may be in one that's no bigger nor a man's hand."

Yes, yes, yes," said Sir Edward, impatiently; "I tell you I've heard you say that sort of thing a hundred times. Come to the point. What is there between Walter and

you?"

"There's nothing, father—nothing whatever. I haven't seen Crockford for ages, except on the road. He has done nothing to me nor I to him."

"Then you'd better be off to your breakfast, and leave

him to me," said the father, calmly.

His mind was as composed as his looks. He felt no alarm about his son, but with a little amusement cast about in his mind how he was to draw out of the old road-mender the probably very small and unimportant thread of complaint or remonstrance that was in him. But Walter showed no inclination to budge. He did not, it would appear, care for his breakfast. He stood with his head cast down, but his eye upon Crockford, not losing a single movement he made. Sir Edward began to feel a faint misgiving, and old Crockford took his colored handkerchief out of his breast and began to mop his forehead with it. It was a cold morning, not the kind of season to affect a man so. What did it all mean?

"Look here," said Sir Edward, "this can't go on all day. Crockford, you have some sense on ordinary occasions. Don't think to put me off with clouds and storms, etc., which you know have not the least effect upon me;

but tell me straight off, what has Walter to do with it?

and what do you mean?'' It's something about a lodger he has. There is a-young lady living there. I've seen her two or three times. She has spoken to me even, thinking, I suppose, that I was a gentleman who would not take any advantage. But the old man doesn't think so; he thinks I'm likely to do something dishonorable—to be a cad, or-I don't know what. You know whether I'm likely to be anything of the sort. If you have any confidence in me you will send him away-" and take and then

"'A young lady!" Sir Edward exclaimed, with amazehim that spoke of guilt. He stopped sport at

ment.

And that's not just the whole of it, sir, as Mr. Walter tells you," said Crockford, put on his mettle. "I'm not one as calls a young gentleman names; cad and such-like isn't words as come nat'ral to the likes of me. But as for being a lady, there ain't no ladies live in cottages like mine. I don't go against ladies-nor lasses neither, when they're good uns. ? mort yesomos betree bed eH Ilvod

"What does all this mean? I think you are going out of your senses, Wat-both Crockford and you. Have you been rude to any one?-do you think he has been rude to any one? Hold your tongue, Wat! Come, my man, speak

out. I must know what this means."

"It means that he is trying to make mischief-"

"It means, sir," said Crockford, in his slow, rural way, taking the words out of Walter's mouth-"I beg your pardon, Sir Edward. I don't know as I'm giving you the respect as is your due, though there's none-I'm bold to say it, be the other who he may-as feels more respect. It means just this, Sir Edward," he went on, advertised by an impatient nod that he must not lose more time, "as there's mischief done, or will be, if you don't look into it, between this young gentleman—as is a gentleman born, sir, and your heir—and a little—a—a—" (Walter's fiery eye, and a certain threatening of his attitude, as if he might spring upon the accuser, changed Crockford's phraseology, even when the words were in his mouth)-"a young person," he said, more quickly, "as is not his equal, and never can be; as belongs to me, sir, and is no more a lady nor-nor my Martha, nor half as good a girl."

Surprise made Sir Edward slow of understanding-sur-

prise and an absence of all alarm, for to his thinking Walter was a boy, and this talk of ladies, or young persons, was unintelligible in such a connection.

He said, "There is surely some strange mistake here. Walter's-why, Walter is-too young for any nonsense of this kind. You're-why, you must be-dreaming, Crock-

ford! You might as well tell me that Horry-"

Here Sir Edward's eyes turned, quite involuntarily, unintentionally upon Walter, standing up by the mantel-piece with his hands in his pockets, his face burning with a dull heat, his eyes cast down, yet watching under the eyelids every action of both his companions—a nameless air about him that spoke of guilt. He stopped short at the sight; everything in Walter's aspect breathed guilt-the furtive watch he kept, the dull red of anger and shame burning like a fire in his face; the attitude—his hands in his pockets, clinched as if ready for a blow. The first look made Sir Edward stop bewildered, the second carried to his mind a strange, painful, unpleasant, discovery. Walter was no longer a boy! He had parted company from his father, and from all his father knew of him. This perception flashed across his mind like a sudden light. He gasped, and could say no more. It way ob- 1910 The of the

Crockford took advantage of the pause. "If I may make so bold, sir," he said, "it's you as hasn't taken note of the passage of time. It ain't wonderful. One moment your child here's a boy at your knee, the next his heart's set on getting married—or wuss. That's how it goes. I've had a many children myself, and seen 'em grow up and buried most on 'em. Martha, she's my youngest, she's a good lass. As for the lads, ye can't tell where ye are; one day it's a peg-top and the next it's a woman. If I may make so bold, I've known you man and boy for something like forty years; and I'm sorry for you, Sir Edward, that I

eman-se ma Sir Edward heard as if he heard it not, the bourdonnement of this raw rustic voice in his ears, and scarcely knew what it meant. He turned to his son without taking any notice. "Walter," he said, with something keen, penetrating, unlike itself in his voice, "what is this? what is this? I don't seem to understand it." He was going to be angry presently, very angry; but in the first place it was necessary that he should know. "I won't deceive you, father," said Walter. "From his point of view I suppose he's right enough—but that is

not my point of view.",

"Mr. Walter," old Crockford said, beginning one of his speeckes. The old man in his patched coat of an indescribable color, the color of the woods and hedgerows, with his red handkerchief in a wisp round his neck, the lock of thin gray hair smoothed over his bald crown, his hat in his old knotted rugged hands, all knuckles and protrusions, came into Sir Edward's mind, as the companion figure leaning on the mantel-piece had done, like a picture all full of meaning; but he stopped the old man's slow discourse with a wave of his hand, and turned to his son, impatiently. He had not voice enough in his bewilderment to say, "Go on"—he said it with his hand.

"Well, sir?" said the lad, "I don't know what I have to say; there are things one man doesn't tell another, even if it's his father. There's nothing in me that is dishonorable, if that is what you mean. If there were, it is her eye

I should shrink from first of all."

Her eye! The father stood confounded, not able to believe his ears. He made one more attempt at a question, not with words, but with a half-stupefied look, again si-

lencing Crockford with his hand.

"I tell you, father," cried Walter, with irritation, "there are things one man doesn't tell another, not even if—" He was pleased, poor boy, with that phrase; but the examination, the discovery was intolerable to him. He gave a wave of his hand toward Crockford, as if saying, "Question him—hear him—hear the worst of me!" with a sort of contemptuous indignation; then shot between the

two other men like an arrow, and was gone.

"Things one man doesn't tell to another, even if it's his father." One man to another! was it laughable, was it tragical? Sir Edward, in the confusion of his soul, could not tell. He looked at Crockford, but not for information; was it for sympathy? though the old stone-breaker was at one extremity of the world and he at the other. He felt himself shaking his head in a sort of intercommunion with old Crockford, and then stopped himself with a kind of angry dismay.

"If you've anything to say on this subject, let me have

it at once," he said.

"I can talk more freely, sir, now as he's gone. That young gentleman is that fiery, and that deceived. The young uns is like that, Sir Edward; us as is older should make allowances, though now and again a body forgets. I'm one that makes a deal of allowances myself, being a great thinker, Sir Edward, in my poor way. Well, sir, it's this, sir—and glad I am as you're by yourself and I can speak free. She's nobody no more nor I am. She's a little baggage, that's what she is. How she come to me was this. A brother of mine, as has been no better than what you may call a rollin' stone all his life, and has done a many foolish things, what does he do at last but marry a woman as had been a play-actress, and I don't know what. They say as she was always respectable—I don't know. And she had a daughter, this little baggage as is here, as was her daughter, not his, nor belonging to none of us. But her mother, she bothered me to 'ave 'er, to take her out of some man's way as wanted to marry her, but his friends wouldn't hear of it. And that's how it is. How she came across Mr. Walter is more than I can tell. That's just how things happens, that is. You or me, Sir Edward, begging your pardon, sir, it's a thing that don't occur to the likes of us; but when a young gentleman is young and tender-hearted, and don't know the world- The ways of Providence is past explaining," Crockford said.

Sir Edward stood with that habitual look in his face of

Sir Edward stood with that habitual look in his face of a man injured and aggrieved, and full of a troubled yet mild remonstrance with fate, and listened to all this only half hearing it. He heard enough to understand in a dull sort of way what it was which had happened to his boy, a thing which produced upon him perhaps a heavier effect than it need have done by reason of the vagueness in which it was wrapped, the blurred and misty outlines of the facts making it so much more considerable. It was not what Crockford said it was, not the mere discovery that his son had got into a foolish "entanglement," as so many have done before him, with some village girl, that produced this effect upon him. It was Walter's words so strangely dislocating the connection between them, cutting the ground from under his feet, changing the very foundations of life; "things one man doesn't tell to another'—one man!—to another. He kept saying it over in his mind with a be-wilderment that kept growing, a confusion which he could

not get right—one man, to another. It was this he was thinking of, and not what Crockford had said, when he went back to the dining-room, where all the children had finished breakfast, and his wife met him with a look so full of surprise. "What has kept you, Edward? everything is cold. Have you sent Wat out for anything? Has anything happened?" she said.

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I, that know more of the world than you can do. Our

MATERNAL DIPLOMACY.

"You had better send the children off to play, and never mind if everything is cold. It's my own fault; it's the fault of circumstances." He seated himself at table as he spoke and helped himself to some of the cold bacon, which was not appetizing; nor had he much appetite. His face was full of care as he swallowed his cup of tea, keeping an eye uneasily upon the children as they were gradually coaxed and led and pushed away. When the door closed upon the last of them there was still a moment of silence. Sir Edward trifled with his cold bacon, he crumbled his roll, he swallowed his tea in large abstract gulps; but said nothing, his mind being so full, yet so confused and out of gear. And it was not till his wife repeated her question, this time with a tone of anxiety, that he replied,

"What is it? It's something that has taken me all

aback, as you see. It's-something about a woman."

"Something about a woman!" she repeated with the utmost astonishment; but had he said "something about a cabbage," Lady Penton could not have been less alarmed.

"Living at old Crockford's," he went on. "I don't understand the story. The old man talked and talked,

and Walter-" notation to list say on well organize

"What has Walter to do with it, Edward? He has gone out without any breakfast. Have you sent him to see after anything? Where has he gone?"

"Gone! is he gone? Why, he's gone to her, I suppose; that's the amusing thing. He says 'there's things one man doesn't tell to another;' one man!—that's how Wat speaks to me, Annie." He gave a laugh which was far from joyful. "I think the boy's gone off his head."

"Wat says I don't know what you mean, Edward."

"No more do I; it's past understanding. It's the sort of thing people talk of, but I never thought it would come in our way. It's an entanglement with some girl in the village. Don't you know what that means?"

"Edward!" cried the mother; and a flash of color like a flame passed over her face. She was confounded, and

unable to make any comment even in her thoughts.

"You can't take it in, and I don't wonder; neither can I, that know more of the world than you can do. Our Wat, that has never seemed anything but a school-boy! Why, Horry will be saying presently, 'There are some things that one man doesn't tell to—' I don't know what the world is coming to,' he cried, sharply. When Sir Edward himself was taken by surprise he felt by instinct that something sudden and unexpected must have occurred to the world.

Lady Penton was perhaps still more taken by surprise than her husband. But she did not make any observations against the world. The sudden flush faded from her face as she sat opposite to him, her astonished eyes still fixed upon him, her hands crossed in her lap. But a whole panorama instantly revealed itself before her mind. How could she have been so blind? .Walter had been absent continually, whenever he could get an opportunity of stealing away. The reading in the evening, and a hundred little kindly offices which he had been in the habit of performing for his sisters, and with them, had all dropped, as she suddenly perceived. For weeks past he had been with them very little, taking little interest in the small family events, abstracted and dreamy, wrapped in a world of his own. She saw it all now as by a sudden flash of enlightenment. "Some things a man doesn't tell to another man" -oh, no, not even to another woman, not to his mother! How strange, bewildering, full of confusion, and yet somehow how natural! This was not her husband's point of view. To him it was monstrous, a thing that never used to happen, an instance of the decay and degradation of the world. Lady Penton, though the most innocent of women, did not feel this. To her, with a curious burst of understanding, as if a new world had opened at her feet, it seemed natural, something which she ought to have expected, something that expanded and widened out her own world of consciousness. Walter, then, her boy, loved

somebody. It brought a renewed, fainter flush to her cheek, and a wonderfully tender light to her eyes. She thought of that first, before it occurred to her to think (all being the work of a moment) who it was who had opened this new chapter in her boy's life, and made Walter a man, the equal of his father. Oh, that he should have become the equal of his father, a man, loving, drawing to himself the life of another, he who was only a boy! This wonder, though it might have an acute touch in it, had also a curious sweetness. For Lady Penton was not the hungering jealous mother of one child, but the soft expansive parent of many, and never had shut herself up in the hope

of retaining them altogether for her own.

"It is very strange," she said, after a pause, "it takes a good time to accustom one's self to such an idea" (which was not the case, for she had done it in the flash of a moment). "It would be quite nice—and agreeable," she added, with some timidity, "if it was a—right person; but did you say, Edward—what did you say?"

"Nice!" he cried, with an explosion like thunder, or so it seemed to his wife's ears, a little nervous with all that had happened. "You can't have listened to what I have been saying. I told you plainly enough. A girl that has been living at old Crockford's, a girl out of the village no, worse, much worse, sent down from London, to be out of some one's way-"

Lady Penton had sprung to her feet, and came toward him with her hands clasped, as if praying for mercy. "Oh! Edward, no, no, no; don't say all that, Edward,"

"What am I to say? It's all true so far as I know. You can ask Martha about her. Perhaps that's the best way; trust one woman to tell you the worst that's to be said of another. Yes, I think on the whole that's the best

way. Have her up and let us hear-"

"What!" said Lady Penton, "call up Martha, and question her about a thing that Walter's mixed up in? let her know that we are in trouble about our boy? make her talk about—about that sort of thing—before you? I don't know what sort of a woman you take me for, Edward. At all events, that is not what you would ever get me to do."

He stared at her, only partially understanding-perhaps indeed not understanding at all, but feeling an obstacle vaguely shape itself in his path. "Annie," he said, "there's no room for sentiment here; whatever the girl is, she's not a person that should ever have come in Walter's way.

Upon which his mother, without any warning, began suddenly to cry, a thing which was still more confusing to her husband; exclaiming by intervals, "Oh! my Wat!" "Oh! my poor boy! What did you say to him? You must have been harsh, Edward; oh, you must have been harsh; and to think he should have rushed out without any breakfast!" Lady Penton sobbed and cried.

It was not very long, however, before the mistress of the house, returning to the routine of domestic matters and with no trace of tears about her, though there was a new and unaccustomed look of anxiety in her eyes, found Martha in the pantry, where she was cleaning the silver, and lingered to give her a few orders, especially in respect to the plate. Lady Penton pointed out to her that she was using too much plate-powder, that she was not sufficiently careful with the chasings and the raised silver of the edges, with various other important pieces of advice, which Martha took with some courtesies but not much satisfaction. Lady Penton then made several remarks about the crystal which it would be impertinent to quote; and then she smoothed matters by asking Martha how her mother was. not seen her for some time; I suppose she doesn't go out in this cold weather, which is good for no one," said Lady Penton.

"Oh, my lady, there's worse things than the bad weather," cried Martha. She was her father's child, and apt, like him, to moralize.

"That is very true; but the bad weather is at the bottom of a great deal of rheumatism and bronchitis as well as

many other things."

"Yes, my lady, but there's things as you can't have the doctor to, and them's the worst of all."

"I hope none of your brothers are a trouble to her, Martha; I thought they were all doing so well?"

"Oh, it ain't none of the boys, my lady. It's one as is nothing to us, not a blood relation at all. Father was telling master—or at least he come up a purpose to tell master, but I begged him not," said the young woman, rubbing with redoubled energy. "I said, 'father, what's

the good?"

"You are very right there, Martha; Sir Edward is only annoyed with complaints from the village; he can't do anything. It is much better in such a case to come to me."

"Yes, my lady; I didn't want them to trouble you neither. I told 'em her ladyship had a deal to think of. You see, my lady, mother's deaf, and things might go on—oh, they might go on to any length afore she'd hear."

"I know she is deaf, poor thing," Lady Penton said.

"That was why I didn't want her to take a lodger at all, my lady. But Emmy's not a lodger after all. She's a kind of relation. She's Uncle Sam's wife's daughter, and she didn't look like one as would give trouble. She's just as nice spoken as any one could be, and said she was to help mother; and so she does, and always kind. Whatever father says she's always been kind—and that handy, turning an old gown to look like new, and telling you how things is worn, and all what you can see in the shops, and as good-natured with it all—"

"Of whom are you speaking, Martha? Emmy, did you say? who is Emmy? I have never heard of her before."

"She's the young woman, my lady; oh! she's the one—she's the young person, she's—it was her as father came to speak of, and wouldn't hold his tongue or listen to me."

"What is there to say about her? Sir Edward, I am afraid, did not understand. He has a great many things to think of. It would have been much better if your father had come to me. Who is she, and what has she done?"

Lady Penton spoke with a calm and composure that was almost too complete; but Martha was absorbed in her own

distress and suspected nothing of this.

"Please, my lady," she cried, with a courtesy, "she have done nothing. She's dreadful taking, that's all. When she gets talking, you could just stop there forever. It's a great waste of time when you've a deal to do, but it ain't no fault of hers. She makes you laugh, and she makes you cry, and though she don't give herself no airs, she can talk as nice as any of the quality, as if she was every bit a lady—and the next moment the same as mother or like me."

"She must be very clever," said Lady Penton. "Is she

pretty, too?"

"I don't know as I should have taken no notice of her looks but for other folks a-talking of them," said Martha. "I don't know as I sees her any different from other folks; but as for good nature and making things pleasant, there ain't none like her high nor low."

"And what is she doing here? and why did your father come to Sir Edward about her?" said Lady Penton, in her magisterial calm.

magisterial calm.

"Oh, my lady, you'll not be pleased; I'd rather not tell you. When father does notice a thing he's that suspicious! I'd rather not—oh, I'd rather not!"

"This is nonsense, Martha—you had much better tell me. What has this girl been doing that Sir Edward ought to know?"

Martha twisted her fingers together in overwhelming em-

"Oh, my lady, don't ask me! I could not bear to tell you—and you'd not be pleased."

"What have I to do with it, my good girl?" said Walter's mother, as steadily as if she had been made of marble; and then she added, "but after hearing so much I must know. You had better tell me. I may perhaps be of use

to her, poor thing!"

"Oh, my lady, Sir Edward'll tell you. Oh, what have I got to do pushing into it! Oh, if you're that kind, my lady, and not angry!" Here Martha paused, and took a supreme resolution. "It's all father's doing, though I say

it as shouldn't. He thinks as Mr. Walter—oh, my lady, Mr. Walter's like your ladyship—he's that civil and kind!"

"I am glad you think so, Martha. Gentlemen are very different from us; they don't think of things that come into every woman's mind. I shall be angry, indeed, if you keep me standing asking questions. What has all this to do with my son?"

"It's all father's ways of thinking. There's nothing in it—not a thing to talk about. It's just this—as Mr. Walter has seen Emmy a time or two at the cottage door. And he's said a civil word. And Emmy is one as likes to talk to gentlefolks, being more like them in herself than the likes of us. And so—and so—father's taken things into his head—as he did, my lady," cried Martha, with a blush and a sudden change of tone, "about John Baker and me."

"About John Baker and you?"

"Yes, my lady," cried Martha, very red; "and there's no more truth in it the one nor the other. Can't a girl say a word but it's brought up against her, like as it was a sin? or give a civil answer but it's said as she's keeping company? It ain't neither just nor right. It's as unkind as can be. It's just miserable livin' where there's naught

but folks suspecting of you all round."

"Martha, is that how your father treated John Baker and you? I think you're hard upon your father. He behaved very well about that, and you know you were yourself to blame. This that you tell me is all nonsense, to be sure. I will speak to Mr. Walter." She paused a little, and then asked, "This Emmy that you tell me of-is she a nice girl?"

"Oh, yes, my lady."

"Is she one that gives a civil answer, as you say, whoever talks to her?"

"Oh, yes, my lady."

"Not particularly to young men?"
"Oh, no, my lady," said Martha, with vehemence, her

countenance flaming red, like the afternoon sun.
"If that is all true," said Lady Penton, "you may be sure she shall have a friend in me. But I hope it is all true."

"As sure as—oh, as sure as the catechism or the prayerbook! Oh, my lady, as sure as I'm speaking; and I wouldn't deceive your ladyship-no, I wouldn't deceive you, not for nothing in the world!"

"Except in respect to John Baker," said Lady Penton, with a smile; at which Martha burst out crying over the silver that she had been cleaning, and made her plate-

powder no better than a puddle of reddish mud.

This led Lady Penton to make a few more observations on the subject with which she had begun the conversation; and then she went away. But if Martha was left weeping her mistress did not carry a light heart out of the pantry, where she had got so much information. The picture of the village siren was not calculated to reassure a mother. She had thought at first that Martha was an enemy, and ready to give the worst version of the story; and then it had turned out that Martha herself was on the side of the girl who had fascinated Walter. Had she fascinated Walter? Was it possible—a girl at a cottage door—a girl who

—gave a civil answer? Lady Penton's imagination rebelled against this description; it rebelled still more at the comparison with John Baker, with whom Martha herself had gone through a troublous episode. Walter Penton like John Baker! She tried to smile, but her lips quivered a little. What was this new thing that had fallen into the peaceful family all in a moment like a bomb full of fire and trouble? She could not get rid of the foolish picture the girl at the cottage door, smiling on whosoever passed, with her civil answer; and Walter-her Walter, her firstborn, the heir of Penton-Walter caught by that vulgar snare as he passed by! Had it been a poor lady, the curate's daughter, the immaculate governess of romance-but the girl whose conversation was so captivating to Martha, who described what things were worn, and all that you could see in the shops—and then, with a smile at the cottage door, caught the unwary boy to whom every girl was a thing to be respected. Martha's little bubble of tears in the pantry were nothing to the few salt drops that came to her mistress's eyes. But Lady Penton went afterward to the bookroom and told her husband that, so far as she could make out, old Crockford must have made a mistake. Martha gives a very good account of the girl," she said, "and Walter, no doubt, had only talked to her a little, meaning

"He would not have answered me as he did this morning if there had been no harm," said Sir Edward, shaking his head.

"You must have been harsh with him," said his wife. "You must have looked as if you believed Crockford, and not him."

"I was not harsh; am I ever harsh?" cried the injured father.

"Edward, the boy darted out without any breakfast! How is he to go through the day without any breakfast? Would he have done that if you had not been harsh to him?" Lady Penton said.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WAITING.

THE day was a painful one to all concerned: to the father and mother, who knew, though vaguely, all about it, and to the children who knew only that something was wrong, and that it was Walter who was in fault, a thing incomprehensible, which no one could understand. The girls felt that they themselves might have gone a little astray, that they could acknowledge as possible; but Walter! what could he have done to upset the household. to make the father so angry, the mother so sad?—to rush out himself upon the world without his breakfast? That little detail affected their minds perhaps the most of all. The break of every tradition and habit of life was thus punctuated with a sharpness that permitted no mistake. He had gone out without any breakfast-rushing, driving the gravel in showers from his angry feet. When the time of the midday repast came round there was a painful expectancy in the house. He must return to dinner, they said to themselves. But Walter did not come back for dinner. He was not visible all day. The girls thought they saw him in the distance when they went out disconsolately for a walk in the afternoon, feeling it their duty to Mab. Oh, why was she there, a stranger in the midst of their trouble! They thought they saw him at the top of the steep hill going up from the house to the village. But though they hurried, and Anne ran on in advance, by the time she got to the top he was gone and not a trace of him was to be seen. Their hearts were sadly torn between this unaccustomed and awful cloud of anxiety and the duties they owed to their guest. And still more dreadful was it when the Penton carriage came for Mab with a note only, telling her to do as she pleased, to stay for a few days longer if she pleased. "Oh, may I stay?" she asked, with a confidence in their kindness which was very flattering, but at that moment more embarrassing than words could say. The two girls exchanged a guilty look, while Lady Penton replied, faltering: "My dear! it is very sweet of you to wish it. If it will not be very dull for you—" Oh, dull!" said Mab, "with Ally and Anne, and all the children: and at Penton there is nobody!" A frank statement of this sort, though it may be selfish, is flattering; indeed, the selfishness which desires your particular society is always flattering. None of them could say a word against it. They could not tell their visitor that she was-oh, so sadly!-in their way, that they could not talk at their ease before her; and that to be compelled to admit her into this new and

unlooked-for family trouble was such a thing as made the burden miserable, scarcely to be borne. All this was in their hearts, but they could not say it. They exchanged a look behind backs, and Lady Penton repeated, with a faint quaver in her voice, "My dear! Of course, we shall be only too glad to have you if you think it will not be dull." When Mab ran to write her note and announce her intention to remain, the three ladies felt like conspirators standing together in a little circle, looking at each other dolefully. "Oh, mother, why didn't you say they must want her at Penton, and that we did not want her here?" "Hush, girls! Poor little thing, when she is an orphan, and so fond of you all; though I wish it had been another time," Lady Penton said with a sigh. They seized her, one by each arm, almost surrounding her, in their close embrace. "Mother, what has Wat done? Mother, what is it about Wat?" "Oh, hush, hush, my dears!" And Lady Penton added, disengaging herself with a smile to meet Mab, who came rushing into the room in great spirits, "I think as long as the daylight lasts you ought to have your walk." It was after this that the girls thought they saw Walter, but could not find any trace of him when they reached the top of the hill.

There had never been any mystery, any anxiety, save in respect to the illnesses that break the routine of life with innocent trouble which anybody may share, in this innocent household. To make excuses for an absent member, and account for his absence as if it were the most natural thing in the world-not to show that you start at every opening of the door, to refrain heroically from that forlorn watch of the window, that listening for every sound which anxiety teaches: to talk and smile even when there are noises, a stir outside, a summons at the door that seems to indicate the wanderer's return-how were they to have that science of trouble all in a moment? Lady Penton leaped to its very heights at once. She sat there as if all her life she had been going through that discipline, talking to Mab, surveying the children, neglecting nothing, while all the while her heart was in her ears, and she heard before any one the faintest movement outside. They were all very silent at table, Sir Edward making no attempt to disguise the fact that he was out of humor and had nothing to say to any one, while the girls exchanged piteous looks and kept up

an anxious telegraphic communication. But Walter never appeared. Neither to dinner, neither in the evening did he return—the two meals passed without him, his place vacant, staring in their faces, as Anne said. Where was he? What could he be doing? Into what depth of trouble and misery must a boy have fallen who darts out of his father's house without any breakfast, and, so far as can be known, has nothing to eat all day? Where could he go to have any dinner? What could have happened to him? These words express the entire disorganization of life, the end of all things in a family point of view, which this dreadful day meant to Walter's sisters, and to his mother in a less degree. Nothing else that could have been imagined would have reached their hearts in the same way. And the last aggravation was given by the fact that all this which they felt so acutely to imply the deepest reproach against Walter was apparent to little Mab, sitting there with her little smiling face as if there was no trouble in the world. Oh, it was far better, no doubt, that she should suspect nothing, that she should remain in her certainty, so far as Penton Hook was concerned, that there was no trouble in the world! But her face, all tranquil and at ease, her easy flow of talk, her questions, her commentaries, as if life were all so simple and anybody could understand The impatience which sometimes almost overcame all the powers of self-control in Ally and in Anne, can not be described. They almost hated Mab's pretty blue eyes, and her comfortable, innocent, unsuspecting smile. Had any one told them that little Mab, that little woman of the world, was very keenly alive to everything that was going on, and had formed her little theory, and believed herself to know quite well what it was all about, the other girls would have rejected such an accusation with disdain.

It was quite late, after everything was over, the children all in bed, all the noises of the house hushed and silent, when Walter came home. The family were sitting together in the drawing-room, very dull, as Lady Penton had forewarned the little guest they would be. She herself had suggested a game of besique, which she was ready to have played had it been necessary: but Ally and Anne could not for shame let their mother take that rude and arduous task in hand. So this little group of girls had gathered round the table, a pretty contrast in their extreme freshness and

youthfulness. The gravity of this, to her, terrible and unthought-of crisis, the horror of what might be happening, threw a shade upon Ally's passive countenance which suited it. She was very pale, her soft eyes cast down, a faint movement about her mouth. She might have burst out crying over her cards at any moment in the profound tension of her gentle spirit. Anne was different; the excitement had gone to her head, all her faculties were sharpened; she had the look of a gambler, keen and eager on her game, though her concentrated attention was not on that at all. She held her head erect, her slender shoulders thrown back, her breath came quickly through her slightly opened lips. Mab was just as usual, with her pretty complexion and her blue eyes, laughing, carrying on a little babble of remark. "A royal marriage! Oh, Anne, what luck!" "Another card, please—yes, I will have another." Her voice was almost the only one that disturbed the silence. Lady Penton in her usual place was a little indistinct in the shade. She had turned her head from the group, and her usually busy hands lay clasped in her lap. She was doing nothing but listening. Sometimes even she closed her eyes, that nothing might be subtracted from her power of hearing. Her husband, still further in the background, could not keep still. Sometimes he would sit down for a moment, then rise again and pace about, or stand before the bookshelves as if looking for a book; but he wanted no book—he could not rest.

And then in the midst of the silence of the scene came the sounds that rang into all their hearts. The gate with its familiar jar across the gravel, the click of the latch, then the step, hurried, irregular, making the gravel fly. Lady Penton did not move, nor did Sir Edward, who stood behind her, as if he had been suddenly frozen in the act of walking, and could not take another step. Ally's cards fell from her hands and had to be gathered from the floor with a little scuffle and confusion, in the midst of which they were all aware that the hall door was pushed open, that the step came in and hurried across the hall upstairs and to Walter's room, the door of which closed with a dull echo that ran through all the house. Their hearts stood still; and then sudden ease diffused itself throughout the place-relief-something that felt like happiness. He had come back! In a moment more the girls'

voices rose into soft laughter and talk. What more was wanted? Wat had come back. As long as he was at home, within those protecting walls, what could go wrong? "Oh, what a fright we have had," said Ally's eyes, with tears in them, to those of Anne; "but now it's all over! He has come back. " w slongs you you are jour

The parents looked at each other in the half light under the shade of the lamp. When Walter's door closed upstairs Sir Edward made a step forward as if to follow to his son's room, but Lady Penton put up her hand to check him. "Don't," she said, under her breath. It still seemed to her that her husband must have been harsh. "Some one must speak to him," said Sir Edward, in the same tone; "this can not be allowed to go on." "Oh, no, no; go on! oh, no, it can't go on." "What do you mean, Annie?'' cried her husband, leaning over her chair. "Do you think I should take no notice after the dreadful day we have spent, and all on his account?" "No, no," she said, in a voice which was scarcely audible; "no, no." "What am I to do, then-what ought I to do? I don't want to risk a scene again, but to say 'no, no,' means nothing. What do you think I should do?"

She caught his hand in hers as he leaned over her chair, their two heads were close together. "Oh, Edward, you've always been very good to me," she said.

"What nonsense, Annie! good to you! we've not been

two, we've been one; why do you speak to me so?"

"Edward," she whispered, leaning back her middle-aged head upon his middle-aged shoulder. "Oh, Edward, this once let me see him. I know the father is the first. It's right you should be the first; but, Edward, this once let me see him, let me speak to him. He might be softer to his mother."

There was a pause, and he did not know himself, still less did she know, whether he was to be angry or to yield. He had perhaps in his mind something of both. He detached his hand from hers with a little sharpness, but he said, "Go, then: you are right enough; perhaps you will manage him better than I."

She went softly out of the room, while the girls sat over their cards in the circle of the lamplight. They had not paid much attention to the murmur of conversation behind them. They thought she had gone to see about some sup-

per for Walter, who had probably been fasting all day, an idea which had also entered Ally's mind as a right thing to do; but mother, they knew, would prefer to do it herself. She did not, however, in the first place, think of Walter's supper. She went up the dim staircase, where there was scarcely any light, not taking any candle with her, and made her way along the dark passage to Walter's door. He had no light, nor was there any sound as she opened the door softly and went in. Was it possible he was not there? The room was all dark, and not a murmur in it, not even the sound of breathing. A dreadful chill of terror came over Lady Penton's heart. She said with a trembling voice, "Walter, Walter!" with an urgent and frightened no egado benefit el loti

There was a sound of some one turning on the bed, and Walter's voice said out of the dark in a muffled and sullen tone, "What do you want, mother? I thought here I

might have been left in peace!"

"What!" she cried, "in peace. Is this how you speak

to me? Oh, my boy, where have you been?"

"It can't matter much where I've been. I've been do-

ing no harm."

"No, dear. I never thought you had," said his mother, groping her way to the bedside and sitting down by him. She put out her hand till it reached where his head was lying. His forehead was hot and damp, and he put her hand away fretfully.

"You forget," he said, "I'm not a baby now."
"You are always my boy, Wat, and will be, however old you may grow. If your father was harsh he did not mean it. Oh, why did you rush away like that without any breakfast? Walter, tell me the truth, have you had anything to eat? have you had some dinner? Tell me the truth."

There was a pause, and then he said, "I forget: is that all you think of, mother?"

"No, Wat, not all I think of, but I think of that too.

If I bring you up something will you eat it, Wat?"
"For pity's sake let me alone," he said, pettishly, "and

go away.,

[&]quot;Let me alone, mother, for to-night. I can't say any-

thing to-night. I came to bed on purpose to be quiet: leave me alone for to-night."

"If I do, Wat, you will hear us, you will not turn your

back upon us to-morrow?"

To regreet was the sides of the "Good-night, mother," said the lad.

He turned his head away, but she bent over him and kissed his hot cheek. "I will tell your father he is not to say anything. And I will leave you, since you want me. But you will take the advice of your best friends to-morrow, Wat."

"Good-night, mother," he said again, and turned his flushed and shamefaced cheek to respond, since it was in

the dark, to her kiss.

e dark, to her kiss.
"Wat, there is nobody in the world can love you as we

do. God bless you, my dear," she said.

And listening in the dark, he heard the faint sound of her soft footsteps receding, passing away into the depths of the silent house, leaving him not silent, not quiet, as he said, but with a wild world of intentions and impulses whirling within him, all agitation, commotion, revolution to his finger-ends.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

POOR WALTER!

WHEN Walter, in ungovernable excitement, trouble, and impatience, rushed out of the house in the morning, leaving old Crockford to make he knew not what revelations to his father, he had no idea either what he was going to do, or how long it might be before he returned home. It might have been that he was leaving the Hook -his birthplace, the only home he had ever known-for years. He might never see all these familiar things again—the pale river winding round the garden, the poplar-tree, thin and naked, in the wind, the little multitude in the dining-room making a hum and murmur of voices as he darted past. In his imagination he saw so clearly that breakfast-table-his mother dividing to each of the children their proper share, Ally and Anne, and little Molly, with her spoon, making flourishes, and calling, "Fader, fader!" He saw them all with the distinctness of inward vision as he darted away, though his mind was full of another image. The pang with

which, even in the heat of his flight, he realized that he was going away, lay in the background of his heart, as that picture was in the background of his imagination; foremost was the idea of seeing her at once, of telling her that all was over here, and that he was ready to fly to the end of the world if she would but come with him, and that all should be as she pleased. He had forgotten the suggestion of last night about the oath which he would have to take as to his age. Nothing was apparent to him except that his secret was betrayed, that all was over, that she alone remained to him, and that nothing now stood between him and her. He rushed up the hill to the cottage, feeling that reserves and concealments were no longer necessary, that the moment of decision was come, and that there must be no more delay. He would not wait any longer patroling about the house till she should see him from a window or hear his signal. He went up to the cottage door and knocked loudly. He must see her, and that without a moment's delay.

It seemed to Walter that he stood a long time knocking at the cottage door. He heard the sound of many goings and comings within, so that it was not because they were absent that he was not admitted. At last the door was opened suddenly by old Mrs. Crockford, who was deaf, and who made no answer to his demand except by shaking her head and repeating the quite unnecessary explanation that she was hard of hearing, backed by many courtesies and

inquiries for the family.

"My master's out, Mr. Walter—Crockford's not in, sir; he's gone to work, as he allays does. Shall I send him, sir, to the 'ouse when he comes in to 'is dinner?' she said, with many bobs and hopes as how her ladyship and all the family were well.

Whether this was all she knew, or whether the old woman was astute, and brought her infirmity to the aid of her

wits, he could not tell.

"I want to see your niece," he said—" your niece—your niece Emmy: I want to see Emmy," without eliciting any further reply than, "My master's out, Mr. Walter, and I'm a little 'ard of 'earing, sir."

He raised his voice so that she must have heard him, and surely, surely, in the condition in which things were, ought to have answered him! But perhaps she was anxious to

keep up appearances still. He said, in his loudest voice, "I'am leaving home; I must see her;" but even this produced no response: and at last he was obliged to go away, feeling as if all the machinery of life had come to a standstill, and that nothing remained for him to do. He had abandoned one existence, but the other did not take him up. He roamed about, for he scarcely knew how long, till the wintery sun was high in the sky, then came back, and, in the audacity of despair-for so he felt it-knocked again, this time softly, disguising his impatience, at the cottage door. He had acted wisely, it appeared, for she herself opened to him this time, receding from the door with a startled cry when she saw who it was. But this time he would not be put off. He followed her into the little room in front, which was a kind of parlor, adorned by the taste of Martha and her mother, cold, with its little fire-place decked out in cut paper, and the blind drawn down to protect it from the sun. He caught sight of a box, which seemed to be half packed, and which she closed hastily and pushed away.

She turned upon him when he had followed inside this room, with an angry aspect that made poor Walter tremble. "Why do you hunt me down like this?" she cried; "couldn't you see I didn't want you when you came this morning pushing your way into the house? Though it's a cottage, still it's my castle if I want to be private here!"

"Emmy!" cried the youth, with the keenest pang of misery in his voice.

"Why do you call out my name like that? You objected to what I told you last night. Go away now. I don't want to have anything to say to a man that objects to my plans as if I didn't know what's right and what's wrong!"

"I object to nothing," said the boy. "You sent me away from you, you gave me no time to think. And now my father knows everything, and I have left home; I shall

never go back any more."

"Left home! And how does your father know every-

thing? And what is there to know?"

"Nothing!" cried Walter—" nothing, except that I am yours, heart and soul—except that I desire nothing, think of nothing, but you. And they had never heard of you before!"

She closed the door and pushed a chair toward him.

"How did they know about me?—what do they know now? Was it you that told them? And what do they think?" she cried, with a slight breathlessness that told of excitement.

Poor Walter was glad to sit down, he was faint and weary; that rush out-of-doors into the frosty air without any breakfast, which had affected the imaginations of his family so much, had told on him. He felt that there was no strength in him, and that he was glad to rest.

"It was old Crockford who told them," he said. "He came in upon me this morning like a—like a wolf: and my father of course heard, and came to see what it was."

"Oh," she said, in a tone of disappointment, not without contempt in it, "so it was not you! I thought perhaps, being so overwhelmed by what I said, you had gone right off and told your mother, as a good boy should. So it was only old Crockford? and I gave you the credit! But I might have known," she added, with a laugh, "you had not the courage for that!"

"Courage! I did not think of it," he said. "It did not seem a thing to tell them. How was I to do it? And Crockford came—I don't know what for—to forbid me the

house."

"No; but to drive me out of it!" she said, with a look which he did not understand. "So you hadn't the courage," she said. "You have not much courage, Mr. Walter Penton, to be such a fine young man. You come here night after night, and you pretend to be fond of me. But when it comes to the point you daren't say to your father and mother straight out, 'Here's a girl I'm in love with, and I want to marry her. I'll do it as soon as I'm old enough, whether you like it or not; but if you were nice, and paid a little attention to her, it would be better for us all.' That is what I should have said in your place. But you hadn't the heart, no more than you'd have had the heart to run a little risk about your age and say you were six months older than you are. That's like a man! You expect a girl to run every risk, to trust herself to you and her whole life; but to do anything that risks your own precious person, oh, no! You have not the heart of a mouse; you have not the courage for that!"

She spoke with so much vehemence, her eyes flashing, the color rising in her cheeks, that Walter could not say a word in his defense—and, besides, what was there to say?

So far was he from having the courage to broach the subject in his own person, that when it had been begun by Crockford he had not been able to bear it, but had rushed away. He sat silent while she thus burst forth upon him, gazing at her as she towered over him in her indignation. He had seldom seen her in daylight, never so close, and never in this state of animation and passion. His heart was wrung, but his imagination was on fire. She was a sort of warrior-maiden—a Britomart, a Clorinda. Her eyes blazed. Her lip, which was so full of expression, quivered with energy. To think that any one should dare to think her beneath them!—of a lower sphere!—which was what he supposed his own family would do when they knew; whereas she was a kind of goddess-a creature made of fire and flame. To brave his father, with her standing by to back him; to deceive a registrar—about a miserable matter of age-six months more or less-what did these matter? What did anything matter in comparison with her? -in comparison with pleasing her, with doing what she wished to be done? He was a little afraid of her as she stood there, setting the very atmosphere on fire. If she ever belonged to him, became his familiar in every act of his life, might there not arise many moments in which he should be afraid of what she might think or say? This thought penetrated him underneath the fervor of admiration in his soul, but it did not daunt him or make him pause.

He said, "It is true I did not tell my father first. It did not come into my head. I can't be sure now that it's the thing to do. But when Crockford said what he did I told him it was so. It is the first time," said Walter, with a little emotion, "that I ever set myself against my father. It may come easier afterward, but it's something to do it the first time. Perhaps you've never done it, though you are braver than I."

She laughed loudly with a contempt that hurt him.

"Never done it! Never done anything else, you mean! I never got on with my mother since I was a baby; and father, I never had any—at least I never saw him. Well! so you spoke up boldly, and said—what did you say?"

"Oh, don't bother me!" he cried. "How can I tell what I said? And now I've come away. I have left home,

Emmy. I am ready to go with you, dear, anywhere—if you like, to the end of the world."

"I've no wish for that," she said, with a softer laugh.

"I'm going to London; that's quite enough for me."

"Well," cried the lad, "I'll go with you there; and all can be settled—everything—as you will. It can be nothing wrong that is done for you."

"Oh, you're thinking of the license again," she said; never mind that. I've been thinking too; and you can't have your money till you're twenty-one, don't you know? Swearing will do you no good there—they want certificates and all sorts of things. And of course you can't go to the end of the world, or even to London, without any money. So you must just wait and see what happens. Perhaps something will take place before then that will clear the property of the course you can't go to the something will take place before the part that will clear the course you can't go to the something will take place before the part that will clear the course you can't go to the something will take place before the part that will clear the course you can't go to the something will take place before the part that will clear the course you can't go to the something will take place before the part that will clear the course you can't go to the something will take place before the part that will clear the course you can't go to the something will take place before the part that will be a something the course you can't go to the something will take place before the part that you can't go to the something the part that you can't go to t something will take place before then that will clear you altogether from me.

He listened to the first part of this with mingled calm and alarm. To wait these six months, could he have seen her every day, would not have disturbed Walter much, notwithstanding the blaze of boyish passion which had lighted up all the world to him. The idea of a new life, an entire revolution of all the circumstances round him, and the tremendous seriousness of marriage, had given him a thrill of almost alarm. It was a plunge which he was ready to take, and yet which appalled him. And when she said that he could not have his money till he was twentyone, a sensation half of annoyance, yet more than half of content, came over his soul. He could bear it well enough if only he could see her every day: but when she added that threat about the possibility of something happening, Walter's heart jumped up again in his breast.
"What can happen?" he said. "Dear, nothing shall

happen. If you are going to London I'll go too—I must be near where you are—I've no home to go back to. London will be the best; it's like the deep sea, everybody says.

Nobody will find me there."

"You must not be too sure of that. Sir Edward Penton's son could be found anywhere. They will put your arrival in the papers, don't you know? 'At Mivart's, Mr. Walter Penton, from the family seat.'" She broke off with a laugh. Walter, gazing at her, was entirely unaware what she meant. The fashionable intelligence of the newspapers, though his mother might possibly give an eye to it,

was a blank to him; and when she met his serious impassioned look, the girl herself was affected by it. It was so completely sincere and true that her trifling nature was impressed in spite of everything. She despised him in many ways, though she was not without a certain liking. for him. She was contemptuous of his ignorance, of the self-abandonment which made him ready to follow her wherever she went, even of his passion for herself. Emmy was very philosophical, nay, a little cynical in her views. She was ready to say and believe that there were many prettier girls than herself within Walter's reach, and the idea that he cared for anything but her prettiness did not occur to this frank young woman. But the look of absolute sincerity in the poor boy's eyes touched her in spite of herself. She put her hands on his shoulders with a momentary mute caress, which meant sudden appreciation, sudden admiration, like that with which an elder sister might have regarded the generous impulse of a boy: then withdrew laughing from the closer approach which Walter, blushing to his hair, and springing to his feet, ventured upon in response. "No, no," she cried, "run away now. You can come back later; I'm very busy, I've got my packing to look after, and a hundred things to do—there's a dear boy, run away now."

"I am not a boy, at least not to you," he cried, "not to you; you must not send me away."
"But I must, and I do. How can I get my things ready with you hanging about? Run away, run away, do; and you can come back later, after it's dark-not till after it's

dark. And then—and then—" she said.

He obeyed her after awhile, moved by the vague beatitude of that anticipation. "And then—" Nothing but the highest honor and tenderness was in the young man's thoughts. He did not know indeed what to do when he should reach London with that companion, where he could take her, how arrange matters for her perfect security and welfare until the moment when he should be able to make her his wife. But somehow, either by her superior knowledge, or by that unfailing force of pure and honest purpose which Walter felt must always find the right way, this should be done. He went away from her cheered and inspired. But when he had got out of sight of the cottage he was not clear what to do for the long interval that must

elapse; home he could not go-where should he go? He thought over the question with the icy blast in his face as he turned toward the east. And then he came to a sudden resolution, not indeed consciously inspired by Emmy, but which came from her practical impulse. In another mood, at another stage, her suggestion about his money might have shocked and startled him. It seemed now only a proof of her superior wisdom and good sense, the perfection of mind which he felt to be in her as well as the sweetness of manner and speech, the feeling, the sentiment, all the fine qualities for which he gave her credit, and for which he adored her, not only for the beauty in which alone she believed. And if he was about to do this bold and splendid thing, to carry off the woman he loved, and marry her by whatever means—and are not all means sanctified by love?—surely, certainly, whatever else might be necessary, he would want money. Having made up his mind on this point, Walter buttoned his coat, and set off for Reading like an arrow from a bow. There he managed to dine with great appetite, which would have been a comfort to his mother had she known it, and had an interview with Mr. Rochford, the solicitor, on the subject of the money which had been left to him (as he preferred to think) by old Sir Walter, the result of which was that he got with much ease a sum of fifty pounds (to Walter a fortune in itself), with which in his pocket he walked back with a tremendous sense of guilty elation, excitement, and trouble. He lingered on the road until after dark, as she had said, until, as he remembered so acutely, the hour of the evening meal at home, when the family would be all gathering, and every one asking, Where is Wat? He had rebelled before against the coercion of that family meal. This time it drew him with a kind of lingering desire which he resisted, he who before had half despised himself for obeying the habit and necessity of it. He went to his old post under the hedge, not knowing whether Emmy wished her departure with him to be known. For himself he did not care. If everybody he knew were to appear, father and mother, and all the authorities to whom he had ever been subject, he would have taken her hand and led her away before their faces. So he said to himself as he waited in the cold, half indignant, at that wonderful moment of his fate, that any concealment should be necessary. The cot-

tage was all dark; there was not even a light in the upper window, such as was sometimes there, to make him aware that she looked for him. Not a glimmer of light and not a sound. The cottage seemed like a place of the dead. It seemed to him so much more silent than usual that he took fright after awhile, and this, in addition to his feeling that the time for secrecy was over, emboldened him in his impatience. He went up to the cottage door and knocked repeatedly more and more loudly after awhile, with a sensation of alarm. Was it possible that old deaf Mrs. Crockford was alone in the house? He had time to get into a perfect fever of apprehension before he heard a heavy step coming from behind, and the door was opened to him by Crockford himself, who filled up the whole of the little passage. The old man had a candle in his hand. "What, is it you, Mr. Walter?" he cried, astonished. "Where is she?" said Walter. "What have you done with her? Will you tell her I am here?" He could not speak of her familiarly by her name to this man. But Crockford had no such delicacy; he stared Walter in the face, looking at him across the flame of the candle, which waved and flickered in the night air.
"Emmy!" he said. "Why, Mr. Walter, she's gone

hours ago!"

"Gone! Where has she gone? You've driven her away.

Some one has been here and driven her away!"

"Ay, Mr. Walter! The fly at the Penton Arms as she ordered herself to catch the two o'clock train; that's what drove her away, and thankful we was to be quit of her; and so should you be, my young gentleman, if you was wise. She's a little—"

"Hold your tongue!" cried Walter. "Who has driven her away? Is it my father?—is it— Some one has been here to interfere. Silence! If you were not an old man

I'd knock you down."

"Silence, and asking me a dozen questions? That's consistent, that is! There's been nobody here—not a soul. She's gone as she intended. She told my old woman as soon as she heard I'd been down at the house. I didn't believe her, but she's kept her word. All the better for you, Mr. Walter, if you only could see it; all the better, sir. She's not the same as you think. She's—''
'Silence!' cried Walter again. "I don't believe she

has gone away at all; you are making up a story; you are trying to deceive me!"

At this old Crockford opened the door wider and bid him enter, and Walter, with eyes which were hot and painful, as if the blood had got into them, stared in, not knowing what he did. He had no desire to investigate. He knew well enough that it was true. She had sent him out of the way and then she had gone. She had not thought him worth the trouble. She had wanted to get rid of him. This sudden blow awoke no angry flush of pride, as it ought to have done. He felt no blame of her in his mind; instead, he asked himself what he had done to disgust her with him. It must be something he had done. He had disgusted her with his folly-with his hesitation about transgressing any puritanical habits of thought for her sake: and then by his talk about his home. He remembered her flash of disappointment, of contempt, when he had owned that it was not he who had told his father. Of course she had despised him, how could he think otherwise? She was ready to trust herself to him, and he had not been strong enough to make the least sacrifice for her. He turned and went away from Crockford's door without a

And after that he did not know very well how he got through the weary hours. He walked to the railway station and prowled all about with a forlorn sort of hope that she might have missed her train. And then quite suddenly it occurred to him, having nothing else to do, that he might go home. He went, as has been seen, to his room in the dark, and sent his mother away with an entreaty to be left alone. He was not touched by his mother's voice, or her touch or blessing. He was impatient of them, his mind being full of other things. His mind, indeed, was full of Emmy-full to bursting. It might be well for him that she was gone, if he could have thought so. He half agreed to that in his soul. But he would not think so. Had he carried her off triumphantly his mind would have been full of a hundred tremors, but to lose her now was more than he could bear. He lay thinking it all over, longing for the morning, in the dark, without candle or any other comfort, sleeping now and then, waking only to a keener consciousness. And then he became aware by some change in the chill, for there was none in the light, that it was morning.

He got up in the dark—he had not undressed, but had been lying on the bed with the coverlet drawn over him in his morning clothes. It was very cold and blank, the skies all gloom, the river showing one pale gleam and no more. He got up as quietly as he could and stole down-stairs and opened stealthily the house door. 'No one was stirring, not even the servants, though in so full a house they were always early. The fresh morning air blew in his face and refreshed him. He felt his fifty pounds in his pocket. He scarcely thought of the misery he would leave behind him. Long enough, he said to himself, he had been bound by the family, now his own life was in question, and he must act for himself. There was a train at half past six which he could just catch. How different it was from his night drive so short a time ago! Then he was acting reluctantly for others, now willingly for himself. The cold air blew in his face with a dash of rain in it. He shut the gate quietly not to make a noise, but never looked back. the proprieties of Linear remains that is the case of such a londestic events of the Walter

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE LOST SON.

THE parents respected poor Wat's seclusion, his misery and trouble, though it was so hard to keep away from him; not to go and talk to him, remonstrating or consoling; not to carry him a tray, to implore him to eat a little. They resisted all these impulses: the last, perhaps, was the most difficult. Lady Penton had to call to her aid all the forces of her mind, to strengthen herself by every consideration of prudence, before she could overcome the burning desire which came back and back, with renewed temptation, a hundred times in the course of the evening to take up that tray. A few sandwiches, a little claret, or some beer, would have done him no harm; and who could tell whether he had eaten enough to sustain his strength in the course of the day? But, what with her own self-reminders that it was wiser to leave him to himself, what with the half taunts, half remonstrances of her husband—"If I am not to say a word to him, which I believe is nonsense, why should you?"-holding herself as it were with both hands, she managed to refrain. The first time that such a breach comes into a family-that one member of it withdraws in

darkness and silence into his own room, not to be disturbed, not to be found fault with, not even to be comforted-till to-morrow-how keen is the pang of the separation, how poignant the sense of his solitude and anguish! In such circumstances it is the culprit generally who suffers least. The grieved and perhaps angered parents, pondering what to say to him, how to do what is best for him, how not to say too much, afraid to make the fault appear too grave, afraid to make too little of it, casting about in their anxious souls what to do: the brothers and sisters looking on in the background, questioning each other with bated breath, their imaginations all busy with that too touching, too suggestive picture of the offender in his room, left to himself, eating nothing, communicating with nobody -how dreadful when it is for the first time! what a heartbreaking and hopeless wretchedness when custom has made it common, and there is no longer any confidence in remonstrance or appeal. It is generally some evident breach of the proprieties or minor morals that is the cause of such a domestic event. But this time nobody knew what Walter had done. What had he done? it could not be anything wrong. He had quarreled with father: to be sure that was as though the heavens had fallen: but yet it could only be a mistake. Father no doubt had been impatient; Wat had been affronted. They had not waited, either of them, to explain. The girls made it clear to each other in this way. At all events, it was all over now. No doubt poor Wat had spent a miserable day: but no one would remind him of it by a word, by so much as a look, and it was all over, and would be remembered no more.

The parents got up in the morning with many a troubled thought. They asked each other what it would be best to say. Perhaps it would be wisest to say as little as possible: perhaps only to point out to him that, in his position, now truly the heir of Penton, any premature matrimonial project would be ruinous: that he was far too young; that in any case, supposing the lady were the most eligible person

in the world, it would be necessary to wait.

"If that is what he is thinking of," said Sir Edward.

"What else could he be thinking of?" cried Lady Penton.

Or if perhaps it was only a passing folly, a foolish little flirtation, nothing serious at all? Then perhaps a few

words only, to remind him that in his position one must not do such things, one must not lead a silly girl to form expectations—

"Oh, bother the silly girl!" said Sir Edward; "what are her expectations to us? It is Wat I am thinking of."
"Dear Edward," said the mother, "he will be far, far more likely to see the folly of it if you show him that it might have a bad effect upon another."

At this Sir Edward shook his head, thinking that his wife did not here show her usual good sense, but he made no objection in words, and finally it was decided between them that as little as possible was to be said, nothing at all at first, and that the poor boy was to be allowed to have his

breakfast in peace. In ad guildyns blood waregmos sandw

But at breakfast Walter did not appear. It was thought at first that he was late on purpose, waiting perhaps till the children had finished—till he might have a hope of being alone; or at least, if he had to face his father, to secure that no one else should be present when he was called to account. By and by, however, a thrill of alarm began to be felt; and then came a terrible disclosure which froze their very blood-Gardener coming to his work very early in the morning had met Mr. Walter leaving the house. He had on his big great-coat and a bag in his hand, and he was in a great hurry, as a man might be who was bent on catching the seven o'clock train. Walter's room was searched at once in case he should have left a note or anything to explain: but there was not a scrap of explanation. He was gone, that was clear. He had taken some linen, a change of dress in his bag; his drawers were left open, and all the contents thrown about, as is usual when a man selects for himself a few articles of dress to take with him. The look of these drawers carried dismay to his mother's heart. He was gone. Where had he gone? So young, so little accustomed to independent action, so ignorant of the world! Where had the boy gone? what had happened to him? Lady Penton recollected after the event, as we so often do, that Walter had made no response to her suggestions of what was to be said and done to-morrow. He had answered "Good-night, mother," and no more; that was no answer. He had never said he would accept her advice to-morrow, that he would discuss what had happened, or hear what his father had to say. "Good-night, mother,"

that was all he had said. And oh! she might have known, when he eluded the subject in this way—she might have known! She ought to have been on her guard. Sir Edward said very little; his face grew dark with anger and indignation, and he walked off at once in the direction of the village without saying where he meant to go. All at once from their happiness and unsuspecting peace the family plunged into that depth of dismay and misery which comes with the first great family anxiety. It seemed to them all who were old enough to understand anything about it that a great shame and horror had come into the midst of them. Walter had left home without a word; they did not know where he was, or why he had gone, or in whose company. Could anything be more terrible? Just grown to man's estate, and he had disappeared, and no one knew where he had gone!

The period that followed is beyond description in these pages. Out of the clear serenity of innocent life this blameless household fell—as into an abyss of terror and shame, of new experiences unthought of, and new conditions. The girls, with a gasp, behind backs, scarcely daring to look at each other, heard their mother say to Mab, who was so great an aggravation of their trouble, that Walter had gone—to town on business; that he had preparations to make and things to get before he went to Oxford. Lady Penton said this in a voice which scarcely faltered, looking the visitor, who was so sadly out of place in the midst of the agitated company, in the face all the time.

"Oh, to be sure," said Mab, "they always do. Any excuse is good enough for gentlemen, don't you think, Lady Penton? they are always so pleased to get to town."

Lady Penton looked quite gratefully at the girl. "Yes,"

she said; "they all like it."

"And so should I," said little Mab, "if I were a boy." It was not of any importance what little Mab said, and yet it was astonishing how it comforted Lady Penton. She said to the girls afterward that living so quietly as they had all done made people disposed to make mountains out of mole-hills. "But you see that little girl thinks it quite a common sort of thing," she said.

But Sir Edward's gloomy face was not a thing that was capable of any disguise. He was in movement the whole day long. He went all about, taking long walks, and next

day went up to London, and was absent from morning to night. He never said anything, nor did the girls venture to question him. There seemed to have grown a great difference between them—a long, long interval separating him from his daughters. He had long private conversations with his wife when he came back; indeed, she would withdraw into the book-room when she saw him coming, as if to be ready for him. And they would shut themselves up and talk for an hour at a time, with a continuous low murmur of voices.

"Oh, mother, tell us," Ally or Anne would cry when they could find her alone for a moment, "is there any news? has father found anything out?" to which Lady Penton would reply, with a shake of her head, "Your father hopes to find him very soon. Oh, don't ask questions! I am not

able to answer you," she would say.

This seemed to go on for ages—for almost a life-time—so that they began to forget how peaceful their lives had been before; and to go into Walter's room, which they did constantly, and look at his bed, made up in cold order and tidiness, never disturbed. To see it all so tidy, not even a pair of boots thrown about or a tie flung on the table, made their hearts die within them. It was as if Walter were dead—almost worse. It seemed more dreadful than death

to think that they did not know where he was.

And Mab stayed on for one long endless week. Some one of them had always to be with her, trying to amuse her; talking, or making an effort to talk. Lady Penton was the one who succeeded best. She would let the girl chatter to her for an hour together, and never miss saying the right thing in the right place, or giving Mab the appropriate smile and encouragement. How could she do it? the girls wondered and asked each other. Did she like that little chatter? How did she bear it? Did it make her forget? Or finally—a suggestion which they hardly dared to make-did mother not care so very much? Was that possible? When one is young and very young, one can not be-lieve that the older people suffer as one feels one's self to suffer. It seems impossible that they can do it. They go steadily on and order dinner every day, and point out to the house-maid when she has not dusted as she ought. This suggestion to the house-maid (which they called scolding Mary) was a great stumbling-block to the girls. They

did not understand how their mother could be very miserable about Walter, and yet find fault, nay, find out at all the dust upon the books. They themselves lived in a world suddenly turned into something different from the world they had known, where the air kept whispering as if it had a message to deliver, and sounds were about the house at night as of some one coming, always coming, who never came. They had not known what the mystery of the darkness was before, the great profundity of night in which somewhere their brother might be wandering homeless, in what trouble and distress who could tell? or what aching depths of distance was in the great full staring daylight, through which they gazed and gazed and looked for him, but never saw him. How intolerable Mab became with her chatter; how they chafed even at their mother's selfcommand, and the steadiness with which she went on keeping the house in order, it would be difficult to say. Their father, though they scarcely ventured to speak to him in his self-absorbed and resentful gloom, had more of their sympathy. He not only suffered, but looked as if he suffered. He lost his color, he lost his appetite, he was restless, incapable of keeping still. He could no longer bear the noise of the children, and sickened at the sight of food. And there was Mab all the time, to whom Lady Penton had told that story about Walter, but who, when they felt sure, knew better, having learned to read their faces, and to see the restrained misery, the tension of suspense. Oh, if this spectator, this observer, with her quick eyes, which it was so difficult to elude, would but go away!

At last it was announced that the Russell Pentons were coming to fetch her, an event which the household regarded with mingled relief and alarm. Sir Edward's face grew gloomier than ever. "They have come to spy out the nakedness of the land," he said; "Alicia will divine what anxiety we are in, and she will not be sorry."

"Oh, hush, Edward," said his wife; "we do not want her to be sorry. Why should she be sorry? she knows nothing."

"You think so," he cried; "but depend upon it every-

body knows."

"Why should everybody know? Nobody shall know from me; and the girls will betray nothing. They know

nothing, poor children. If you will only try to look a lit-

tle cheerful yourself, and keep up appearances-"

"Cheerful!" he said, with something of the same feeling as the girls had, that she could not surely care so much. Was it possible that she did not care? But nevertheless he tried to do something to counteract that droop of his mouth, and make his voice a little more flexible and natural, when the sound of the wheels on the gravel told that the Pentons had come. Meanwhile Mab had gone, attended by the sisters, to make her preparations for going. They had packed her things for her, an office to which she was not accustomed, while she mourned over her departure, and did their best not to show her that this was a feeling they did not share.

Mab lingered a little after the carriage arrived. She wanted to show her sympathy, though it was not quite easy to see how that was to be done. She remained silent for a minute or so, and then she said, "I haven't liked to say anything, but I've been very, very sorry," giving Ally a sudden kiss as she spoke.

The two girls looked at each other, as was their wont, and Anne, who was always the most prompt, asked, "Sorry

for what?"

"Do you really, really not know where he is?" said Mab, without pausing to reply. "I think I could tell you where

he is. He is in town with—some one—"

"Some one?" they both cried, with a sudden pang of excitement, as though they were on the verge of a discovery; for unless she knew something—though how could she know anything?—it seemed impossible that she could speak so.

"Oh, the one he went out every night to see. There must have been somebody. When they go out every night like that it is always to see—some one," she said, nodding her head in the certainty of her superior knowledge of the world.

"Oh, how do you know? You are mistaken if you think

that Walter-how can you know about such things?"

"Because I am little," said Mab, "and not very old, that's not to say that I haven't been a great deal about: and I've heard people talking. They pretend they don't talk before girls. I suppose they think they don't. They stop themselves just enough to make you want to find out,

and then they forget you are there, and say all sorts of things. That's where he is, you may be sure: and he will come back by and by, especially if he wants money. You needn't be afraid. That is what they all do. Oh, listen; they are calling us from down-stairs! I am so sorry I must go: I wish I could stay: I like this better than any place I ever stayed at, and you've all been so kind. Write to me and tell me, will you, all about it? I shall be anxious to know. But don't make yourselves miserable, for he will come back when he has spent his money, or when- Yes, we are coming! We are coming! Ally, mind you write and tell me. I shall want so much to know."

They tried to interrupt her again and again to tell her she was mistaken; that Walter had only gone to town; that they were not anxious, or ignorant where he was, or unhappy about him: with much more to the same effect; but Mab's cheerful certainty that she was right overpowered their faltering affirmations, of which she took no notice. She kissed them both with enthusiasm in the midst of her little harangue, and ran on with expressions of her regret as they went down-stairs. "Oh, I wish Lady Penton would have me for good," Mab said; "but you don't care for me as I do for you."

Meanwhile, in the drawing-room, Lady Penton was receiving her visitors with an eager cordiality that was scarcely consistent with her nature, and which was meant to show not only that she was entirely at her ease, but that her husband's gloom, which he had tried to shake off, but not very successfully, did not mean anything. As a matter of fact, the Russell Pentons, knowing nothing of the circumstances of Walter's disappearance, were quite unaware of any effort, or any reason why an effort should be made. They interpreted the husband's half-resentful looks-for that was the natural aspect of distress with Edward Penton -and the excessive courtesy and desire to please, of his wife, as fully accounted for by the position toward each other in which the two families stood. Why should Edward Penton be resentful? He had got his rights, those rights upon which he had stood so strongly when his cousin Alicia had paid her previous visit. She was ready to put a private interpretation of her own on everything she saw. He had resisted then her proposals and overtures, although afterward he had been anxious to accede to them; and now

he was disappointed and vexed that the bargain against which he had stood out at first had come to nothing, and that she would not relieve him from the burden of the expensive house which he had first refused to give up and then been so anxious to be quit of. How inconsistent! How feeble! And the wife endeavoring with her little fuss of politeness to make up, perhaps thinking that she might succeed where her husband had failed! This was how Mrs. Russell Penton interpreted the aspect of the poor people whose object was to conceal their unhappiness from all eyes, and that nobody might have a word to say against the boy who was racking their hearts.

"I have been sorry to leave Mab so long, to give you the trouble," Mrs. Russell Penton said, with her stiff dignity. "Her uncle, in his consideration for me, did not think of

your inconvenience, I fear."

"There has been no inconvenience. We are so many that one more or less does not matter. We have treated her without ceremony, as one of the family-''

"And made her very happy, evidently," said Russell enton. "She is very unwilling to come away."

And then there was a pause. That Mab Russell, the heiress, should be treated as one of the family by these poor Pentons was to Alicia a reversal of every rule which she could scarcely accept without a protest. "It must have been a glimpse of life very different from anything she has been accustomed to," she said at last.

"Yes, poor little thing! with no brothers or sisters of her own."

"She has compensations," said Russell Penton, with a glimmer of humor in his eyes. But Lady Penton looked at him without any response in hers. He was so surprised at this, and bewildered that Mab's value should not be known, that involuntarily, out of the commotion in his own mind, he put a question which seemed full of meaning to the troubled listeners. "I don't see your son," he said.

The father and mother exchanged a miserable look.

"It is known, then," their eyes said to each other; and in

spite of herself the blood rushed to Lady Penton's face and then ebbed away again, leaving her faint and pallid; but she made an effort at a smile. "Walter," she said, "is not at home. He is going to Oxford in a month or two, and he is away for a little." "Taking a holiday?" suggested Russell Penton, with a curious consciousness, though without any understanding,

of trouble in the air.

"Oh, it is rather—business," said the mother. Sir Edward did not change that aspect of severe gravity which he had borne all the time. He had too much set wretchedness in his face to change as she did. "You have been more good to him," she continued, glad of the excuse which justified her trembling voice, "more good than words can say."

"I have no right to any credit: I only carried out my father's wishes," said Mrs. Penton. How severe her tone was! how clear that she was aware that Walter, the recipient of her kindness, had shown himself unworthy! If anything could have made these poor people more unhappy it was this—that their precautions seemed useless and their

trouble known.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

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KEEPING UP APPEARANCES.

THE Russell Pentons stayed a long time—at least, these anxious people thought so, who believed their visitors to be noting the signs of their unhappiness, and forming still stronger and stronger conclusions against their son. The effort Lady Penton made to carry on the conversation was one of those efforts, gigantic, unappreciated, in which women have sometimes to make an expenditure of strength which is equal to years of ordinary exertion. Who can tell the burden it was to talk, to smile, to exhaust all the trivial subjects that occurred to her, to keep at a distance all those graver topics which might bring in Walter-which might lead to discussion of where he was or how employed? She saw, so to speak, half a mile off those tendencies of conversation which might lead to him, and, with a sudden leap, would get away from these to another and another theme, which each in its turn would have to be dismissed and avoided. "All roads lead to Rome," says the proverb; and when there is a certain subject which it is desirable to avoid, all the streamlets of conversation, by some curious tendency, go to that with infallible force. Lady Penton

had to go through a series of mental gymnastics to avoid it -to keep her visitors from any thought of Walter-to hide him, or rather to hide the terrible blank in the house where he ought to have been. Had he been in his usual place the conversation would never have touched him; and, as a matter of fact, the Russell Pentons did not think of him any more than they did of Horry in the nursery, a stray shout from whom could sometimes be heard, leaving no one in any doubt as to his whereabouts. But the mother, flying from subject to subject, talking as she had never been known to talk in her life before, and her taciturn husband, who said not a word that he could help saying-both felt that their misery was open and evident, that the Russell Pentons were saying in their hearts, "Poor people!" or making reflections that the boy's upbringing must have been bad indeed when he had "gone wrong" at such an early age. Lady Penton felt instinctively that this was what must be going through Alicia's mind. The childless woman always says so-it is one of the commonplaces of morals. If he had been brought up as he ought he would not have gone wrong. This and a hundred other things went buzzing through the poor mother's head, confusing her as she talked and talked. "Oh," she said to herself, "it is better that they should think that!-better blame us-blame me, who have been overindulgent, perhaps, or oversevere-overanything, so long as they do not blame him!" But the father was not so disinterested; he was angry as well as miserable. He would have had Walter bear his own guilt; he would not allow those critics who had never had a son to say that it was the parents' fault. So he stood with that resentment in his face, saying so little, only making an annoyed remark when appealed to, short, with suppressed temper in it, while his wife smiled and ran on. How like Edward Penton that was! his cousin thought. He had made a proposal to her which she in her pride would not accept, and his pride could not forgive her. Alica felt that she understood it all—as well as the silly attempt of the wife to smooth it all over and make peace 'etween them—as if the two Pentons did not understand each other better than any outsider! as if this question be-

tween them could be smoothed away by her!

"You will let me come back again?" said Mab, rubbing her little cheek like a kitten against Lady Penton's ear.

"I will never go away unless you say that I may come back."

"What a threat!" said Russell Penton. "In order to get rid of you, Mab, the promise will have to be made."

"Not to get rid of her: we don't want to get rid of her. Yes, my dear, certainly as soon—as soon as we are settled,

when the house is not so dull—"
"It isn't dull, no one can be dull with you. I will tell you what I want in a whisper. I want to come and stay altogether; I want you to have me altogether,' said Mab,

in the confidence of her wealth.

"My dear!" cried Lady Penton, faltering. In spite of her preoccupations she was a little alarmed. She put it off with a kiss of farewell. "You must come as often as you like," she said. "It is sweet of you to wish to come. We shall always be glad to see you, either here or—wherever we may be."

"At Penton," said Mab, once more rubbing her little head against the woman to whom she clung. "Uncle Russell, oh, ask her to have me! There is no place where

I could be so happy."

"You must come as soon as we are settled," said Lady

Penton, in real panic, putting the supplicant away.

Alicia had turned during this too tender and prolonged leave-taking, with a little indignation, to the master of the house. She had never herself either attracted or been attracted to Mab, and she felt resentful, annoyed, even jealous-though she cared nothing for the little thing and her whims—of this sudden devotion. She stood by her cousin, who was resentful and indignant too. "Edward," she said to him, "we needn't quarrel, at least. I know you meant well in offering me Penton. Don't be displeased because I couldn't accept it—I couldn't, from any one, unless it had been my right."

"Penton! do you think of nothing but Penton?" he cried, suddenly, with an incomprehensible impatience of the subject—that subject which had once seemed so im-

portant, which appeared to him so small now.

"I speak for the sake of peace," she said, coldly; "thet need not stand between us now. We go away in a week. The things I mean to remove will be gone within a month. What I wish you to know is, that you may make arrangements for your removal as soon as you please."

"Oh, for our removal! yes, yes," he said, impatiently; there is no hurry about that: if that was all one had to think of-"

"I am sorry that you should have other things to think of. To me it seems very important," Mrs. Russell Penton

"Ah! you have nobody but yourself to be concerned about," he said. But then he met his wife's look of warn-

ing, and added no more.

Russell Penton lingered a little behind the rest. "Let me speak a word to you," he said, detaining Lady Penton; and her heart, which had begun to beat feebly as an end approached to this excitement, leaped up again with an energy which made her sick and faint. Could he know something about Walter? might he have some news to tell her? Her face flushed, and then became the color of ashes, a change of which he was wonderingly aware, though without a notion as to why it was. "You are alarmed," he said "about—"? he said, "about-"

"No, no!" she interrupted, faintly; "not alarmed. Oh, no, you must not think so—not frightened at all," but with fear pale and terrible, and suspense which was desper-

ate, in every line of her countenance.

Russell Penton himself grew frightened too. "There is

nothing to alarm you," he said, "about little Mab."
"Oh!" the breath which had almost failed her came back. A sudden change came over her face; she smiled, though her smile was ghastly. "About—Mab?" she said.

"It is alarming, the way in which she flings herself upon you; but you must let me explain. I see that you think her just a little girl like any other, and her proposal to come and stay with you altogether is enough to make even the most generous pause. But that is not what she means, Lady Penton. She is very rich; she is a little heiress."

The words did not seem to convey much significance to Lady Penton's bewildered soul. "A little heiress," she repeated, vaguely, as if that information threw no light upon the matter. Was she stupid? he asked himself, or ridiculously disinterested, altogether unlike the other women who have sons? "Very rich—really with a great fortune—but no home. She is too young to live by herself. She has never developed the domestic affections before. should like very well to keep her, but it would be a burden on Alicia. Will you think it over? She has evidently set her heart on you, and it would do her so much good to be with people she cared for. There would of course be a very good allowance, if you will let me say so. Do think it over."

They had reached the door by this time, where Sir Edward was solemnly putting his cousin into her carriage. Mr. Russell Penton pressed Lady Penton's hand with a little meaning as he said good-bye. "Walter might have a

try too," he said, with a laugh, as he turned away.

Walter might have—a try. A try at what? His mother's head swam. She put her arm through that of Anne, who stood near her, and kept smiling, waving her hand to Mab in the carriage: but Lady Penton scarcely saw what she was looking at. There was something moving, dazzling before her eyes—the horses, the glitter of the panels, the faces, flickered before her; and then came a rush of sound, the horses' hoofs, the carriage wheels grinding the gravel, and they were gone. Oh, how thankful she felt when they were gone! The girls led her in, frightened by her failing strength, and then Sir Edward came, as gloomy as ever, and leaned over her.

"I don't think they knew," he said; "I don't think

they had heard anything."

Lady Penton repeated to herself several times over "Walter might have a try," and then she too burst forth, "No, Edward, thank God! I am sure they did not know."

He shook his head, though he was so much relieved, and said, half reluctant to confess that he was relieved, "But if it lasts much longer they must know. How can it be kept from them, and from everybody, if it lasts much longer?"

The girls looked at each other, but did not speak; for they were aware, though no one else was, that Mab knew; and could it be supposed that that little thing, who did not belong to them, who had no reason for sharing their

troubles, would keep it to herself and never tell?

They had all thought it would be a relief to be rid of the little spectator and critic, the stranger in the house, and for a time it was so. The rest of the afternoon after she was gone the girls and their mother spent together talking it all over. They had never been able uninterruptedly to talk it over before, and there was a certain painful enjoy-

ment in going over every detail, in putting all the facts they knew together, and comparing their views. Sir Edward had gone out to take one of his long solemn walks, from which he always came in more gloomy, more resentful than ever. He was going up to town once more tomorrow. Once more! He had gone up almost every day, but never had discovered anything, never had found the lost. And in his absence, and freed from Mab, whom they had not been able to get rid of at any moment, what a long, long consultation they had, talking over everything, except what Mab had suggested. She had said it with the intention of consoling, but the girls could not repeat it to each other, or breathe to their mother the suggestion she had made. They were not educated to that point. That their brother should have married foolishly, made an idol of some girl who was not his equal, and followed her out into the unknown world, was dreadful, but comprehensible; but that he should come back by and by when he wanted money-oh, no, no! What they imagined was that scene so well known to romance—the foolish young pair coming back, stealing in, he leading her, ashamed yet proud of her, to ask his parents' forgiveness. The girls went over the details of this scene again and again as soon as they had heard all that their mother had to tell them.

"She must be beautiful," they said; "she may be nice

-oh, she must be nice or Wat would not love her!"

"Oh, my dears," cried Lady Penton, "how can we tell? It is not good girls and nice girls who lead young men away from their duty."

"But, mother, if they love each other!" said Ally, blushing over all her ingenuous, innocent countenance,

with the awe and wonder of that great thing.

Lady Penton did not say anything more, but she shook her head, and then it was for the first time that there came over her the poignant suggestion of that "might have been" which she had not taken into her mind till now. Walter might have a try; little Mab with her heiress-ship had been thrown at his head, as people say: and what it might have been had these two taken to each other—had a great fortune been poured into Penton! Lady Penton had never known what a great piece of good fortune was; she was not one who expected such things. The very advantages of it, the desirableness, made it to her temperate soul

the less likely. It never could have come to pass, all the contrarieties of nature were against it; but still, when she thought that they had spent so many days under the same roof, and might have spent so many more, and how suitable it would have been, and what a good thing for Walter, it was not wonderful that she should sigh. But that was the course of nature, it was the way of human affairs. It

was too good ever to come true.

After the first night, the relief of Mab's departure was not so evident to them. She had been a restraint, not only upon their conversations and consultations, but on the entire abandonment of their life and thoughts to this anxiety and distress. They had been compelled on her account to bear the strain, to make a struggle against it. Now there was no longer that motive. Night and day their ears were intent on every sound; there was always a watcher at the window in the staircase, which commanded the ascending path to the village, a sort of lookout woman ready to dash down-stairs and give notice if by chance—ah! no, by the blessing of God—the wanderer might be seen coming home. The watch here was furtive, lest the servants should note, but it was continual; one or another was always lingering about, looking out with eyes keen and sharp with anxiety-"busy in the distance shaping things, that made the heart beat thick." And so the days passed on, languishing, with dark nights so endless-long in which the anxious watchers could hear only and could not see.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ALLY'S PART.

SIR EDWARD PENTON went to London most days, but he never found out anything. He was not the sort of man to act as an amateur detective, and he would not appeal to the professionals in that capacity. He was an old-fashioned man, and it seemed to him that "to set the police after" his son was an indignity impossible. He could not do it. He tramped about himself, yearning, angry, very tender underneath, thinking if he could only see Walter, meet him, which always seems so likely to country people, in the street, that all would be well. He went to all the places Crockford could tell him of—to Emmy's mother, a faded

old actress of the lower class, whose faded graces, and her vivacity, and what had been, or had been supposed to be, her fascination, made poor Sir Edward's heart sink into his boots. But she professed to know nothing of her daughter's movements, and nothing at all of any gentleman. There had been a gentleman, she allowed, a young man connected with business-but it had been to escape from his addresses that her child had gone to the country: and Emmy was far too high-minded to keep company with any one of whom her mother did not know. In his despair Sir Edward even sought out the shop in which this gentleman in his business hours was to be found, and had an interview with the young man whose appearance in the village had so much alarmed and almost disgusted Walter. No information was to be obtained from him. He declared sullenly that he knew nothing about the girl: yes, he had known her, he didn't deny; he had thought more of her than she was worth. Though it was going against all his family he had stuck to her for a long time, and would have stuck to her as long as she had stuck to him: but he knew nothing about her now. "Is it money, guv'nor; somebody left her a fortune?" he asked at the end of the interview, with a laugh which disconcerted Sir Edward. This was almost all he had been able to do, except tramping about the streets wherever he could think his son was likely to go. The poor gentleman increased his knowledge of London in the most wonderful way during these miserable days. He found out all kinds of back streets and alleys, and corners of building such as he had never remarked before, but all with a veil over them, a mist of trouble. London in January is dark enough even when the eyes are not clouded with suffering and anxiety; but with these added how miserable were the chill streets, the low skies, the yellow thickness of the atmosphere, the hopeless throngs of unknown men and women, always blank, always unresponsive to those strained and troubled eyes! Sometimes he thought he saw before him a slim young figure, moving quickly, as Walter might, through the crowd, and hurried vainly after it, pursuing at a hopeless distance, only to lose it in the everchanging groups. Sometimes with the corner of his eye he would catch a glimpse of some one disappearing round a corner, plunging into a side street, who might be his boy. Alas! it was always a might-be. No happy chance brought

them face to face. Had there been no particular reason for it they would have met, no doubt, in the simplest way; but this is one of the cases in which, as daily experience proves, those who seek do not find. And when Sir Edward returned home after a day so spent, the gloom he brought with him was like a London fog descending bodily upon the country. Probably there had been a little deadening of trouble in the physical exertion and gloomy expectation of these expeditions; but he brought an embodied darkness and desolation home.

On one of the days of his absence Ally was acting as a sort of sentinel in the garden: that is, she was taking a walk, as they said, but with an eye always upon the road and the gate-when her anxious mind was distracted by a sound of approaching wheels, coming, not down the hill, but along the river bank. It was a gray day, damp and soft, with no wind; one of those days which are not unusual in the valley of the Thames; not cold, save for the chill of the damp; very still; the river winding round the Hook in a pale and glistening link; the sky about the same color, which was no color at all, the leafless trees rising black as if photographed upon the gray. The river was lower than usual at this season, though it still flowed with a cruel motion round that little promontory as if meaning to make that bit of vantage ground its own some day. Ally was very sad and quiet, walking up and down, feeling as if life had come altogether to a stand-still save for that one thing; nothing else happening; nothing else seeming ever likely to happen. That furtive little current which had seemed for a moment to rise in her own life had died away. It seemed a long time since those days when young Rochford had come so often to Penton Hook. Perhaps his desire to come often had something to do with the delay which had so changed the face of affairs. This had occurred to Ally more than once, and had given her a secret feeling that it was perhaps her fault, but she had not felt able to regret it. But now all that was over, and Mr. Rochford came no longer. There was nothing for him to come about; and Ally remembered with a sort of half pang, half shame, the reception which had been given to his mother and sister when they called, and the curious sense of mingled superiority and inferiority which had overwhelmed her in their presence. They were far better acquainted with the world

than she was; they were "in society," or, at least, had that air of it which imposes upon simple people; but she was Miss Penton of Penton. She had felt then a great though always half-ashamed pleasure in remembering that elevation: but she had not the same sensations now. She felt that she was a snob (if a girl can be called a snob). She was ungrateful, for they had been very kind to her, and mean and petty, and everything that is most contemptible-feeling herself, only because of Penton (in which there was no merit) somehow exalted above them, the solicitor's mother and sister. Many times since she had blushed at that incident, and sometimes at the most inappropriate moments; when she woke up in the middle of the night a flush would go over her from head to foot, thinking of what a poor creature, what a miserable little snob she was; a girl-snob, far worse than any other kind; worse than anything Mr. Thackeray had put in his book. Ally, like most people of her age, thought she did not like Mr. Thackeray, who seemed to her to make everybody look as if they had bad motives; but even he, so crushing as he was to a little girl's optimism, had not gone so far in his cynical views as to think of a snob who was a girl. Perhaps she was wrong here, putting limits which did not exist to the great humorist's imagination, but that was what she believed. And she was that girl-snob, which was a thing too bad to be conceived by fancy. She had repented this, and she had felt, though vaguely in the rush of other experiences, the blank that had fallen upon that opening chapter in which there had once seemed so much to come, but which had, to all appearance, ended all at once without anything coming of it. This chilled her gentle soul, she could scarcely tell why. How wretched that ball at Penton would have been to her, what a painful blight upon her girlish fancies, if it had not been for these kind people, if it had not been for him. Yes; that was the chief point after all, though she was ashamed to admit it to herself. It had been a pleasant break upon the monotony of life when he paid these frequent visits, when he talked in that suggestive way, making her think of things which he did not mention, raising a soft commotion which she did not understand in her simple being. It had been like a chill to her to perceive that all this was over. It was all over and done with, apparently; it had all dropped like the falling of a curtain over a drama just begun. She had wanted to know how it would all end, what its progress would be, the scenes that would follow: and lo, no scenes had followed at all, the curtain had come down. How wicked and wrong, how horrid it was to think of it at all in the midst of the great calamity that had fallen on the family, to wish even that mother might forget poor Wat for an hour, and go and call, and so make up for the coldness of Mrs. Rochford's reception! This was a thing, however, which Ally had never suggested, which she thought it dreadful to have even thought of in the present trouble. She defended herself to herself by saying that she had not thought of it—it had only flashed across her mind without any will of hers,

which is a very different thing, as everybody knows.

And was it possible while she wandered up and down, always with her attention fixed on the gate, always looking for news, for her father's return, for a telegraph boy, foroh, if that might be! for Walter himself; was it possible that some feeling about this other matter intruded into her mind and shared the thoughts which should have been all devoted to her brother? Ally trembled a little, but could not but blame herself, for she did nothing of the kind with her own will. She only felt a little chill, a little blank, a wonder how that story, if it had gone on, if the curtain had not fallen so abruptly, might have ended. It would have been interesting to know; a broken-off story is always tantalizing, distressful-the world becomes duller when it breaks off and you never know the end. Perhaps this had floated across her mind dimly, not interfering with the watch she was keeping, when suddenly the wheels which had been rolling along, not disturbing her attention-for they did not come in the direction whence news could be expected-startled her by suddenly stopping outside the gate. Who could it be? Her heart began to beat. She made a few steps quickly toward the gate. It could not be her father; could it be Walter bringing back his bride? What could it be? But here suddenly her heart gave another bewildering spring. She felt her breath taken away altogether. The vehicle had stopped outside; and it was young Rochford, in all the gloss of his usual trim appearance, with the usual flower in his coat, who came forward, quickening his steps as he saw her. He did not look quite as he used to look. There was a little doubt about him, as though he did not know how he was to be received—a little pride, as of a man who would draw back at once if he were discouraged. Ally could not help making a few steps further to meet him. She was glad to meet him—oh, there was no doubt of that!—and not only so, but to feel the curtain slowly drawing up again, the story beginning once more, gave everything around a different aspect. She said, "Oh, Mr. Rochford!" with a voice that had welcome in it as well as surprise.

"I have come about some business," he said; but his eyes had already asked several questions, and seemed to derive a certain satisfaction from the unspoken replies. He added, lowering his voice, "I have been on the point of coming almost every day—but I felt as if perhaps—I

might not be welcome."

"Why?" said Ally, with an astonished look, which had no guilt in it; for, indeed, it was not to him, but to his mother and sister, that she had felt herself to behave like a snob.

"I scarcely know," he said. "I thought Sir Edward might feel perhaps that my delay—. But I always half felt, Miss Penton, that you—would be rather pleased with the delay: you and your brother."

"Yes," she said, with a little shiver at Walter's name; it was wrong, perhaps, to go against my father; but I

think perhaps we were glad-a little."

"That has been a consolation; and then— But I must not trouble you with all my reasons for staying away, when most likely you never observed that I stayed away at all."

Ally made no reply to this speech, which was so full of meaning. It was, indeed, so full of evident meaning that it put her on her guard.

"My father is in town," she said, "if it is business; but

perhaps mother-"

"I am too glad," he said, "to meet you first, even for

the business' sake."

Ally looked up at him with wondering eyes. What she could have to do with business of any kind, what light he could expect her to throw on any such subject, she could not understand. But there was something soothing, something pleasant, in thus strolling along the path by the flowing river with him by her side. She forgot a little the watch she had been keeping upon the gate. She recollected that

he had once told her his dream about a flood, and coming in a boat to her window, but that she would not take advantage of the boat herself, only kept handing out the children to him one by one. How could he divine that she would do that? for of course that was exactly what she would do, if such a risk could ever happen, and if he should come to rescue her as in his dream.

Somehow he led her without any apparent compulsion, yet by a persistent impulse, a little way out of sight of the house behind a tuft of shrubbery. The big laurels stood up in their glistening greenness and shut out the pair from the windows of the Hook. They were close to the gray swirl of the river running still and swift almost on a level with the bank, when he said to her suddenly with his eyes fixed on her face, "I want to ask you something about your—brother."

"My brother!" cried Ally. There was a sudden wild flushing up of color which she felt to the roots of her hair, and then a chill fell upon her, and paleness. He was watching her closely, and though she was not aware of it she had answered his question. "My brother," she repeat-

ed, faltering, "Wat? he—he is not at home."

"Miss Penton," said Rochford, "do you think you

could trust me?"

"Trust you!" said Ally, her voice growing fainter: and then a great panic came over her. "Oh! Mr. Rochford," she cried, "if anything has happened to Wat, tell me, tell me! It is the not knowing that is so dreadful to bear."

"I hope nothing has happened to him," he said, very gravely. "It is only that I have had a letter from him, and I thought that perhaps your father had better know."

"Come in and see mother," said Ally, breathless. "Oh yes, yes, we had better know, whatever it is. Mr. Rochford, oh, I hope he is not ill. I hope nothing has happened."

"I can not tell; he has written to me for money."

"For money!" she cried, the expectation in her face suddenly dropping into a blank of astonishment and almost disappointment. "Was that all?" was the question written on Ally's face.

"You don't think that means much? but I fear it means a great deal: he is living in London, and he is very young. You must not think me intrusive or meddling: it is that I

am afraid of. Sir Edward might suppose, Miss Pentonyour mother might think—it is a difficult thing for a man to do. I thought that you, perhaps, if I could see you, might have a little confidence in me."

Ally did not know how it was that a sense of sweetness and consolation should thus shed itself through her heart; it was momentary, for she had no time to think of herself, but it made everything so much more easy to her. She put out her hand involuntarily with a sudden sense that to have confidence in him was the most natural thing. "Oh yes," she said, "tell me, I have confidence. I am sure you would do nothing but what was kind; tell me, oh, tell me!"

He took her hand; he had a right to do it, for she had offered it to him. "Will you try to follow me and understand?" he said. "It is business; it may be difficult for you, for Sir Edward will see the importance of it." And then he told her, Ally bending all her unused faculties to the work of understanding, how Walter had gone to him before he left home at all to get money, and how he had heard from him again, twice over, asking for more. Ally listened with horror growing in her heart, but perhaps the young man, though he was very sympathetic, was scarcely so sorry as he looked: and perhaps to seek her out and tell her this story was not what a man of higher delicacy would have done. But then Rochford's desire to be of use to Walter was largely intermingled with his desire to recommend himself to Walter's sister. He would have done it anyhow out of pity for the boy and his parents, but to secure for himself a confidential interview with Ally, and to have this as a secret between them, and her as his embassador and elucidator to her parents, was what he could not deny himself. He was sorry for Walter, who was most likely spoiling his boyish life, and whom it would be right to call back and restrain: but yet he was almost glad of the occasion which brought him so near the girl whom he loved. She on her part listened to him with excitement, with relief, with the horror of ignorance, with an underlying consciousness that all must now come right.

"If Sir Edward will let me I will go," Rochford said. "I shall be able to get hold of him perhaps easier than any

one who has authority."

"Oh, how kind you are," said Ally.

"Kind! I would lie down and let him walk over me to please you," the young man murmured, as if it were to himself.

It was partly to escape from the embarrassment of such murmurs, though they were sweet enough, and partly to escape from the curious process which was turning her trouble into a semblance of happiness against her will, and without any consent of hers, that Ally insisted at last on carrying this information to her mother. "How could she think you intrusive when you bring her news of Wat?" cried the girl, betraying all the anxiety of the family without knowing it; and she hurried him in to where Lady Penton sat in the window, looking out languidly and often laying down her work to gaze. She, too, flushed with anxious interest to hear of Walter's letter.

And when Sir Edward came home, he found the lawyer's dog-cart still at the door, and the young man, surrounded by the three anxious ladies, laying down his plan to them as one who was master of the situation. "I will go at once if you will let me; I'll get hold of him easier than any one who has a right to find fault," young Rochford was saying, when, cold and hungry and discouraged, and with a smoldering fury against all the world in his heart, Sir Edward pushed the door open and found him there.

CHAPTER XL.

THE POOR BOY.

Walter had plunged into London as a diver plunges into the sea. He was in search of but one thing: to find her again who had eluded him, who had drawn him after her by the strongest chains that can draw the imagination at his age, by all the tantalizing of vague promises, avoiding fulfillment, of vague engagements which came to nothing, and last of all by this sudden flight, a provocation more audacious than any that went before. Could he ever have expected that she would go with him, to wait all the preliminaries which (as she knew so much better than he did) must precede any possible marriage? When he came to think of it by the light of the morning, which alters the aspect of so many things, he saw quite plainly that this was not a thing he could have expected of her. She was

very daring, he thought, and frank, and secure in her own innocence, but this was not a thing which she could be expected to do. He had been foolishly miserable, disappointed to the bottom of his soul, when he heard that she had gone away. The night he had spent trying to sleep, trying to get through the black hours that made any enterprise impossible, had been terrible to him; but with the morning there had come a better cheer. Of course, he said to himself! How could he be so imbecile, so silly, as to think differently. Of course she would not go with him under such circumstances; and it was delicacy on her part that prevented her from saying so. There are times when it is a failure of modesty even to suggest that modesty requires certain precautions. Therefore she had not said it. Impossible for her pure lips, for her pure mind, to put into words the idea that he and she, like any noble knight and maiden, might not have gone together blameless to the end of the world. But she had felt that in the present artificial state of the world it was better not to do this, and she had acted without saying anything, confident that he would understand. There is no limit to the ingenuity of a lover in framing excuses for the actions of the person beloved. Instead of being blamable, was not this another proof of her perfection, of the sensitive delicacy of all her thoughts, she who was so little bound by conventional laws? The mixture of freedom and of reserve, Walter said to himself, was what he had above all admired and adored in her. It was his own stupidity, not any fault of hers, that had given him so wretched a night, such a sense of desertion and abandonment. He remembered now that he had caught the address of the box which stood half packed in the room where she had talked to him, in Crockford's cot-

He comprehended everything now. She had taken him there that he should see it, that he should be able to follow her, without the need of saying a word. Oh, how well he understood it all! Had they gone together every circumstance would have been embarrassing; the mere payments to be made, the railway tickets, the cabs, everything would have been awkward. How well (he thought to himself) her fine sense had divined this, perceived it when he saw nothing! That was no doubt the woman's part, to divine what could and could not be done—to settle

it all swiftly, silently, without any need of talk, which

would have been more embarrassing still.

These thoughts carried him as on fairy wings to the railway station on the dark and cold morning of his flight from home. He had Rochford's fifty pounds in his pocket, which seemed to his inexperience a fortune, a sum he would never get through, and which was his own, not taken from his father, or lessening the means at home, but his, to do what he liked with. With that in his pocket, and the delightful confidence that Emmy had not abandoned himthat, on the contrary, she had done what was ideally right, the very thing that if he had understood, if he had not been dull beyond example, he would have liked her to do-Walter rushed from his father's house with not too much thought of the wretchedness he was leaving behind. He would not think of that, nor did he feel himself at all constrained to do so. Why should they be miserable? He was old enough to know how to take care of himself. A man did get helpless, almost effeminate, living so much at home; but, after all, he could not be made a fuss over as if he were a lost child. They would understand at least that he could take care of himself. And then he reflected, with a smile about the corners of his mouth, they would soon know why it was. If at the bottom of his heart there might be a thrill of alarm as to how they would take it, yet on the surface he felt sure that Emmy's beauty and charm would overcome all objections; and then it was not as if he were a boy dependent on his father's bounty. That ten thousand pounds made all the difference! He had thought at first that it was a mean thing to suppose that it made any difference or disturbed any of the bonds of duty: but now his mind was changed, and he perceived that a man has his own career to think of, that nature forbids him to be always in a state of subordination to his father-nature, and the consciousness that he has enough of his own to live upon without troubling his father. Yes, it made a difference, not only on the surface, but fundamentally, a difference which was real; and then the present matter was not one of a day. It concerned, he said to himself with tremendous gravity, the happiness of his life. How could a little anxiety on the part of his parents, a little quite groundless anxiety, be compared to that? Even to be brutal, he said to himself, as he must live longer than they

could, his happiness was of the most importance, even if it should affect permanently their peace of mind; and it was only for a time, a few weeks, a few days. What comparison was there? Even father himself, who was a just man, would see and acknowledge this. And as for his motheroh, mother would forgive! That was easily settled. She might be unhappy for a moment, but she would rather be unhappy than condemn him to life-long misery. That he was very sure of; if the choice were given she would accept that which was best for him. Thus Walter completely vindicated to himself what he was doing; and before he got to the railway, which was a long way off, and gave time for all these elaborations of thought, he was convinced that what he was doing was what, on the whole, if they knew all the circumstances, they would like him to do.

An ordeal which he had not calculated upon met him when he reached London. The address which he had seen on Emmy's box was in an out-of-the-way and poor place, though Walter, knowing nothing of town, did not know how much out of the way it was. He left his bag at a hotel, and then he went on in a hansom through miles and miles of squalid streets, until at length he reached the goal of his hopes. The goal of his hopes! Was it so? As he stood at the poor little narrow door the ideas with which he had contemplated Crockford's cottage came into his mind. He had persuaded himself into thinking that Crockford's cottage was in its way as venerable as Penton; but this No. 37 Albert Terrace, what was there to be said for it? He could not restrain a little shudder, nor could he, when he was shown into the little parlor on the ground-floor, look round him without a gasp of dismay. The only consolation he could get out of it was that he could take Emmy away, that this was indeed his object here, to take her away, to separate her from everything that was squalid and miserable, to surround her with the graces and luxuries of a very different kind of life. But even the aspect of the house, and of the little parlor, which was full of dirty finery and hung round with photographs and colored pictures of a woman in various theatrical dresses, with whom he never associated the object of his affections, was nothing to the shock which Walter sustained when the door opened and the original of these portraits presented herself, a large

faded woman, very carelessly dressed, and with the smile which was beaming around him from all the walls, the stereotyped smile of the stage, upon her face. To realize, as he did by and by, that this was her mother, to feel that she had a right to ask him questions, and consider him with a judicial air, as one who had in her greasy hands, which were so disagreeably soft, and felt as if they were pomaded, the thread of his life, gave poor young Wat such a shock as took the words from his lips. He stared at her without knowing what to say to her in a dismay which could find no expression. No, Emmy was not there. Her occupation required that she should live in another part of London. No, she did not know that she could give him her daughter's address-but if he returned in the evening he might perhaps see her.

"You are Mr. Penton? Oh, yes, she has spoken of you. She feared that perhaps you would take this step. But, Mr. Penton, my daughter is a girl of the highest principle.

She can see you only under her mother's roof."
"I wish nothing else!" cried poor Wat. "I—I am ready to do whatever she pleases. She knows I am ready—she knows--"

"Yes," said the mother, nodding her terrible head, upon which was banded and braided and plaited more hair than ever grew, and smiling her terrible smile, and putting forth that odious hand to give a little confidential pressure to his. "I also know a great deal, Mr. Penton. I have heard about you-your chivalry and your magnificent position, and your many, many qualities. But, as you know, a mother's duty is to guard her child. I know the shares of life better than she; I have trodden the thorny way before her, young gentleman. I have myself experienced much which—I would save her from," added the woman, with the imposing gesture of a mère noble, turning away her head and extending her hand as if to hold the gay deceiver at a distance.

He was the wolf at the gate of the sheepfold, it appeared. Alas, poor Wat! he did not recognize himself from that point of view. Was not he more like the poor strayed lamb, straying in ignorantly into the midst of the slayers? He was glad to get away, to bring this alarming, unexpected interview to an end: all the more that it had begun to be apparent to him, in a way that made his heart sick, 5-2d half.

that in the face of this woman, with all its traces of paint and powder, and in the little gestures and tricks of tone and movement, there were resemblances, frightful resemblances, suggestive of his Emmy; that it was possible she might some day-oh, horrible thought!-be like her mother. But no, he cried to himself! the marks which her profession had left—the lines under her eyes, the yellow stains of the rouge, the unwholesome softness of her pomaded hands-from all those he had come to deliver Emmy; these artificial evils never need to be hers. She should smile upon people who loved her, not upon the horrible public staring at her and her beauty. As he turned away from the place he even said to himself that this poor woman was not to blame for all those blemishes of self-decoration. It had been her trade; she had been compelled to do it. Who had any right to blame her? These might be as honorable scars as those which a soldier gets in battle. Perhaps she had to do it to get bread for herself and her child -to bring up Emmy and make her what he knew her. If that should be so, were not the traces of what she had gone through, of what she had had to bear, to be respected, venerated even, like any other marks of painful toil? He made these representations hotly to himself, but he did not find that any ingenuity of thought delivered him from that horior and repulsion. To see the rouge and the powder on the face of a young woman still playing her part was one thing; to mark the traces of them on the vulgarized and faded countenance of one whose day was over was quite another. It was unjust, but it was natural. And this was Emmy's mother, and Emmy was like her. Oh, that such a thing should be!

After this came the strangest episode that could occur in a young man's life. He was afloat on London, on that sea of pleasure and misery, amid all the perils and temptations that made the hearts of those who loved him sink within them. Even little Mab, with her little stock of worldly knowledge, who thought he would return home when he "tired," or when his money was done, could form no other idea of the prodigal than that he was living in pleasure. He was amusing himself, Rochford thought, not without a half sympathy in the break-out of the home boy. As for his father and mother, unutterable terrors were in their minds, fears of they knew not what—of vice and depravity, evil

associates, evil habits, the things that kill both body and soul. But Walter's present life was a life more tedious than all the monotony of home. It had its bright moments, when he was with Emmy, who sometimes permitted him to take her to the play, sometimes to walk with her through the bright-lighted streets, sometimes even on Saturday afternoons or Sunday to take her to the country. It was only on these days that he saw her in daylight at all. She said, laughingly, that her occupation forbade it at other times, but she would not tell him what that occupation was. When they went to Richmond or Greenwich, or to a little box in one or other of the theaters, where they could sit half hidden by the curtains, and carry on their own little drama, which was more interesting than anything on the stage, Walter was in a strange elysium, in which the atmosphere was charged with painful elements, yet was more sweet than anything else in life. He made a hundred discoveries in her, sometimes sweet, sometimes-different. It made no alteration in his sentiment when they happened to be discoveries that wounded - sometimes even that shocked him. He was hurt, his sensitive nature felt the shock as if it had been a wound; but it did not affect his love. That love even changed a little—it became protecting, forgiving, sometimes remonstrating; he longed that she should be his, that he might put all that right, mold her to a more exquisite model, smooth away the points that jarred. Already he had begun to hint this and that to her, to persuade her to one little alteration and another. To speak more softly—she had spoken softly enough at Crockford's, it was only the spirit of the street that had got into her blood—to move more gently, to know that some of the things she said were dreadful things—things that should not come from such lips. He had not perceived any of these things while she was at Crockford's; he perceived them now, but they did not affect his love, they only penetrated that golden web with threads of shadow, with lines of pain, and smote his heart with keen arrows of anguish and regret-regret not that he had given his life and love to her, but only that she was less perfect than he had thoughtthat, instead of looking up to her always, and shaping his harsher being (as he had thought) upon her sweetness, it must be his first to shape and pare these excrescences away. But, besides these glimpses of a paradise which had many

features of purgatory, Walter had nothing at all to counterbalance the havor he was making in his existence. He did not know what to do with himself in London. He rose late, having no occupation for the morning; he wandered about the streets; he eat the late breakfast and dinner, which were now all the meals he had time for, spinning out these repasts as long as possible. It was a wonder that he never met his father, who was straying about the streets in search of him; but Walter's streets were not those which his father frequented. He acquired, or rather both acquired, a great knowledge of town in these perambulations, but not of the same kind. And then he would go to his occupation, the only tangible thing in his life, the meeting with Emmy. She was sadly shifty and uncertain even in these scraps of her time, which were all she would or could give him. She was not sure that she wanted to marry him at all. She was quite sure that she would only be married by special license at four in the afternoon, which was all the fashion now. But no; he was not to take that oath and make himself unhappy about her. He should not be obliged to swear. She would be married by bans—that was the fashion too. She knew all about what had to be done-everything that was necessary-but she would not tell him. She laughed and eluded him as before. Then she said, Why should they marry? they were very well as they were. "You are very good to me at present," she said; "you think I must have a box whenever we go to the theater, and a bouquet, and everything that is nice; but after we are married, you will not be so kind."

When Walter protested that neither marriage nor anything else could diminish his devotion, she shook her head,

and said that they would not be able to afford it.

"You can't have so much as five hundred a year," she said; "most likely not more than four—and what would that be in London?"

"But we need not live in London," he said; "my father

would give us the Hook."

Emmy threw up her arms with a scream.

"Should you like to murder me?" she cried.

It hurt the poor boy that she should have this opinion of his home—the home in which he had been born; and he listened with deep depression to the satirical description of it she began to make.

"We ought to be ducks to live in the damp like that. I've never been used to dabble in the water, and it would be my death—I know it would be my death. But we might let it, you know, and that would give us a little more money, say two hundred a year more—do you think it would bring two hundred a year?"

"Don't talk of such things!" cried the young man; "it

is not for you to be troubled about that."

"And for whom is it, then?" she cried, "for you know no more than a baby; and I believe you think we are to live like the birds on worms and seeds, and anything else

that turns up. 'Al nest bat bat same eat to ton Ind

Walter had never left her with so heavy a heart as on this evening. He was entirely cast down by her hesitations, her doubts, the contempt with which she spoke of the fortune which he had thought magnificent in his ignorance, and the home which he loved. He went back to his hotel with a heavy heart. He had given up everything for her-all the other objects that made life of importance. He had put himself altogether at her disposal, and lived but for the moments of their meeting. What was he to do if she despised him-if she cast him off? A faint sense of the pitiful part he had to play began vaguely to awaken in his mind, not moving him to the length of rebellion, nor even to the exercise of his critical faculties, only to misery and a chill suspicion that, instead of sharing the fervor of his feelings, she was weighing him in terrible scales of judgment, estimating what he was worth—a process which made Walter's heart sink. For what was he worth?—unless it might happen to be love-in repayment of that which he gave.

And next evening when he went to the house, which he always approached with a shiver, afraid of meeting the mother, relieved when he found his love alone, he suddenly found himself in the presence he dreaded with a shock of alarm and surprise: for Emmy, whose perceptions were keen enough on this point, generally contrived to spare him the meeting which she divined he feared. Mrs. Sam Crockford met him with her sunniest smile. She caressed his hand with those large, soft, flaccid fingers from which he shrunk. "She is not in, but I have a message for you,

my dear young sir," she said.
"Not in!" cried Walter, his heart sinking into his boots.

"She is engaged elsewhere. May I tell you the truth, Mr. Penton? She has confidence in her mother. I am her only protector, for her step-father, though an honest fellow, does not count, being in another walk of life. I am her only protector, young gentleman."

"But surely, surely she doesn't want protection—from

me?'s a now

"Pardon me, my dear Mr. Penton, that is exactly where she wants protection—from you, that is, from her own heart, from her own treacherous, foolish heart. What have you to offer her, that is the question? She has had very good offers. There is one at present, hung up, so to speak, because she does not know her own mind."

"Let me speak to her," said Walter, hoarsely. "She

can not intend to desert me after all-after all!"

"Dear boy!" cried the woman, pressing his hand once more with hers, "how I admire such impetuosity. But you must remember my duty as a mother. You have nothing to settle on her, Mr. Penton. Yes, I understand your ten thousand pounds; but you are not of age. You can't even make your will or sign the settlements till you are of age. She has very good offers, no one could have better. Shall I tell you," said Emmy's mother, with the most ingenuous and ingratiating of smiles, "shall I tell you what I should do if I were you? I would not allow her to sacrifice herself. I would rather, much rather, that the sacrifice was on my side."

"Sacrifice!" he cried, feeling the dreadful little room

reel round him.

"What else can you call it, Mr. Penton? You will not be twenty-one till the autumn, I hear. October, is it? And in the meantime my chyild has to toil. Conceive a creature of her refined and sensitive temperament, young

gentleman! a girl not adapted to face the world."

This confused Walter, who could not but feel that Emmy was very well qualified to face the world, and to whom she seemed a sort of Una triumphant over it; but he would not reply on this score. All he could say was an impassioned offer if she would only accept—if her mother would but accept—all that he had. What could it matter, when so soon everything he had would be hers?

The mother put away his offer with her large white hand, turning her shoulder to him and half averting her

head. "Money! I dare not propose it; I dare not suggest it, though it is most generous, most noble on your part," she added, turning round suddenly, seizing his hand in both of hers with a soft lingering pressure, which poor Walter could not help feeling left something of the pomade behind. Then she subsided into a more majestic pose. "But, dear fellow, what have you?" she said, with a sort of caressing reflectiveness. It all seemed like a scene in a play to Walter, notwithstanding that he himself was one of the actors. "What have you?" she said, with a sort of tender regret. "Your agent will soon tire of making you advances, and every advance diminishes your capital. We are talking of marriage, my dear young gentleman, not of mere amusement and spending your money free, as some young men will do to please a girl they are in love with; but the object of my life has been to bring up my girl respectable, and nothing of that sort is possible." She waved her hand, dismissing the idea, while Walter stood stupefied, gazing at her. "It is a question of marriage," she added, with solemnity; "and what have you to offer-expectations?" Then she sunk her voice to a sort of stage whisper. "Do you know that your father is after you, young sir? He has been here."

"Here!" said the boy, in sudden alarm and dismay.

She nodded her head slowly and solemnly. "Here. I need not say I gave him no information: but if you rely upon him to receive and support you, as my child has told me— Young Mr. Penton, Emmy must not be exposed to an angry father's wrath."

"My father here!" He looked round him, at the room, at the woman, at all these dreadful accessories, with a sinking heart. He seemed to see them all through his father's eyes, who had never seen Emmy, and to himself they were terrible enough, with all the charm that she exercised.

"No!" she said, raising her arm. "I can not have her exposed to an angry father's wrath. Mr. Penton, this suit

of yours must come to an end."
"I must see Emmy," he cried, with confused misery. "I must see Emmy; don't, don't, for pity's sake, say any more. It is she who must decide."

"Pardon me; she takes her own way in small matters, but in this a mother is the best judge. Mr. Penton, she must not be exposed to an angry-,,

"I must see Emmy, I must see Emmy," cried poor Walter. He was capable of no other thought.

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A MORE CHEERFUL VIEW. Ted belift dallt

SIR EDWARD, with more than the usual irritation in his countenance, contemplated the new member of the family council. He had come in with a great deal to say, and the sight of Rochford was like a sudden check, unlooked for, and most unwelcome. He had, indeed, begun to speak, throwing himself into a chair. "I've got my trouble for my pains—" when he perceived that the weariness, the contrariety, the trouble in his face, had been betrayed to a stranger. He pulled himself up with a sudden effort. "Ah, Rochford," he said, with an attempt at a smiling welcome, which was as much out of his usual habits as of his present state of mind.

"Edward," said his wife, "Mr. Rochford has heard from Walter. He came to bring us the letter; he has some information, and he knows, oh, more than any of us—from

the first. " a see

"What is it he knows?" cried the father, exasperated, with a start of energy in defense of his privacy and of his son. He looked with his angry, troubled eyes at the intruder with an angry defiance and contempt. Rochford the solicitor! the man of business, a man whom indeed he could not treat as an inferior, but who had no claim to place himself on the same level as a Penton of Penton. He had not hitherto shown any disposition to stand on his dignity to make the difference between the old level and the new. But that this young fellow should presume to bring information about his son, to thrust in a new and intrusive presence into a family matter, was more than he could bear. "I am very glad to consult Mr. Rochford on matters within his range," he added, with an angry smile, "but this is a little, just a little, out of his sphere."

"Edward!" cried Lady Penton, and "Father!" cried Ally; the latter with an indignation and resentment which surprised herself. But to hear him, so kind as he was, put down so, put aside when he wanted nothing but to help, had become suddenly intolerable to Ally. Why should

Walter, who was behaving so unkindly, be considered so much above him, who had come out of his way to help? An impulse almost of indignation against Walter filled her mind, and she felt ready to silence her father himself, to demand what he meant. She did not herself comprehend the fervor of new feeling, the opposition, the resentment that filled her heart.

"When Sir Edward reads this letter he will understand," said the young man, who kept his temper admirably. He was ready to bear a great deal more than that, having so much at stake. And he for his part was quite aware that for a Rochford of Reading to ally himself to the Pentons of Penton was a great matter, and one which might naturally meet with opposition. To have his part taken by Ally was a great matter—he could put up with her father's scorn for a time.

Sir Edward read the letter, and his serious countenance grew more somber still. "From this it appears that my son has applied to you for money? I am sorry he has done it, but I don't see that it tells any more. Walter has not made a confidant of you that I can see. My dear, I don't mean to be disagreeable to Mr. Rochford; but he must see, any one might see, that a family matter—a—a consultation among ourselves—a question which has nothing to do with the public—"

"I am your man of business, Sir Edward," said Rochford. "My family have known the secrets of yours long before my time. I don't think we have ever betrayed our trust. Your son has put some information into my hands. I did not think I was justified in keeping it from you, and I think, if you will let me, that I can help you. Intrusion was not what I meant."

He was the least excited of that tremulous party, and he felt that the object which was before him was well worth a struggle; but at the same time the young man was not without a certain generosity of purpose, a desire to help these troubled and anxious people. To Ally his attitude was entirely one of generosity and nobleness. He had come in the midst of the darkness to bring the first ray of light, and he was too magnanimous to be disgusted or repulsed by the petulance of her father's distress. If he had a more individual motive it was that of pleasing her, and that was

no selfish motive, surely. That added - how could it be otherwise?—a charm to all the rest in her dazzled eyes.

"Mr. Rochford is very kind, Edward," said Lady Penton. "Why should we not take the help he offers? He is a young man, he understands their ways, not like you and me. The young ones understand each other, just as we understand each other. They haven't the same way of judging. They don't think how their fathers and mothers suffer at home. Oh, let him go! it isn't as if he would talk of it and betray us. Listen to him. He has known of this all the time, and he hasn't betrayed us. Oh, let him go." m go."
"Go! where is he to go?"

"To find Walter," they all cried together.
"It is killing you," said Lady Penton. "Let the young man-who doesn't feel as we do, who doesn't think of it as we do-let him go, Edward. It seems so dreadful to us, but not to him. He thinks that probably there is nothing dreadful in it at all, that it is a thing that—a thing that boys do: they are so thoughtless—they do it, meaning no particular harm."

"There is something in that," said Sir Edward, with relief. "I am glad you begin to see it in that way, my dear. It is more silly than wrong-I have thought so all along."

"That is what Mr. Rochford says. He is a young man himself. He thinks the boy will never have consideredand that as soon as he thinks, as soon as he finds out-Edward, we mustn't be tragical about it. I see it now as you say. Stay at home—you have so many things to think of—and let the young man go. They understand each other between themselves," Lady Penton said, with a somewhat wan smile.

And then Sir Edward began to relax a little. "Rochford is right there," he said. "It is perhaps a good thing to have a man's view. You, of course, were always unduly frightened, my dear. As for not writing, that is so common a thing-I could have told you all that. But, naturally, seeing you in such a state has affected me. When you are married," he said, turning to Rochford with a faint smile, "you will find that though you may think it weak of her, or even silly, the color of your thoughts will always be affected by your wife's."

This speech produced a curious little momentary dramatic scene which had nothing to do with the question in hand. Rochford's eyes instinctively flashed a glance at Ally, who, though hers were cast down, saw it, and flamed into sudden crimson, the consciousness of which filled her with shame and confusion. Her blush threw a reflection instantaneous, like the flash of a fire, over him, and lighted up his eyes with a glow of delight, to conceal which he too looked down, and answered, with a sort of servile respect, "I have no doubt of it whatever, sir; and it ought to be so."

"Well, perhaps theoretically it ought to be so," Sir Edward said, who noticed nothing, and whose observation was not at any time quick enough to note what eyes say to eyes. Now that it was all explained and settled, and he felt that it was by his wife's special interposition that Rochford had been taken into favor, there could be no doubt that it was a comfort to have a man, with all the resources of youth and an immediate knowledge of that world which Sir Edward was secretly aware he had almost forgotten, to take counsel with. His spirits rose. His trouble had been greatly intensified by that sensation of helplessness which had grown upon him as he wandered about the London streets, sick at heart, obstinate, hopeless, waiting upon chance, which is so poor a support. This day he had been more hopeless than ever, feeling his impotence with that sickening sense of being able to do nothing, to think of nothing, which is one of the most miserable of sensations. It was so far from true that he had taken the color of his thoughts from his wife, or felt Walter's absence more lightly than she had done, that it was he who had been the pessimist all along, whose imagination and memory had furnished a thousand stories of ruin and the destruction of the most hopeful of young men, and to whom it was almost impossible to communicate any hopefulness. But a partnership of any kind is of great use in such circumstances, and above all the partnership of marriage, in which one can always put the blame upon the other with the advantage of being himself able to believe that the matter really stands so. Lady Penton did not complain. She was willing enough to bear the blame. Her own heart was much relieved by Rochford's cheerful intimation that Walter's little escapade was the commonest thing in the world, and

most probably meant nothing at all. If it might but be so! If it were only his thoughtlessness, the folly of a boy! At least if that could not be believed it was still a good thing and most fortunate that people should think so, and the man who suggested it endeared himself to the mother's heart.

And then another and more expansive consultation began. On ordinary occasions Sir Edward allowed himself to be questioned, giving brief answers, sometimes breaking off impatiently, shutting himself up in a troubled silence, from which an unsatisfactory scrap of revelation unwillingly dropped would now and then come. Sometimes he drove them all away from him with the morose irritation of his unsuccess. What did it matter what he had done in town, when it all came to nothing, when it was of no consequence, and brought no result? But to-day he spoke with a freedom which he had never shown before. Everything was more practical, more possible. The new agent had to be informed of all the facts upon which perhaps his better knowledge of such matters might throw new light. Sir Edward confessed that he had extracted from old Crockford the address of the girl's mother, "Though I could not allow—though I mean I feel sure that the boy never mixed himself up with people of that sort," he added, with his little air of superiority; then described Mrs. Sam Crockford to them, and her declaration that she knew nothing of the young gentleman. In his heart of hearts Sir Edward did not believe this any more than Rochford did, but it gave him a countenance, it supported his new theory, the theory so adroitly suggested to him that Walter after all was probably not much to blame. This theory was a greater consolation than can be told to all of them. Not much to blame! Careless only, amusing himself, a thing which most youths of his age did somehow or other. "Of course," Rochford said, "there are some preternatural boys who never tear their pinafores or do anything they ought not to do." Thus he conveyed to their minds a suggestion that it was in fact rather spirited and fine of Walter to claim the emancipation which was natural to his kind. The load which was thus lifted from their gentle bosoms is not to be described. Lady Penton indeed knew better, but yet was so willing to be deceived, so ready to be persuaded! And Sir Edward knew-oh, a great many

variations of the theme, better and worse-but yet was willing too to take the young man's word for it, the young man who belonged to Walter's generation and knew what was in the minds of the boys as none of the others could do. He brought comfort to all their hearts, both to those who had experience of life and those who had none, by his bold assumption of an easy knowledge. "I have no doubt, if truth were told, he is dying to come home," Rochford said, "and very tired of all the noise and nonsense that looks so pleasant at a distance. I know how one feels in such circumstances—bored to death, finding idleness and the theaters and all that sort of thing the dreariest routine, and yet ashamed to own it and come back. Oh, he only wants to see a little finger held up to him from home, I know!" said the young fellow, with a laugh. He did himself the greatest injustice, having been all his life of the order of those who have the greatest repugnance to dirtying their pinafores. But love and policy, and pity as well, inspired him, and his laugh was the greatest comfort in the world to all those aching hearts. He took down Mrs. Sam Crockford's address, and all the information which could be given to him; the very sight of his little note-book inspiring his audience with confidence. "The thing for me to do," he said, "is to take him myself the money he wants. Though the address he gives is only at a post-office I shall find him out—and perhaps take a day or two's amusement in his company," he added, with a

"Oh, Mr. Rochford, that would be kindness indeed!"

Lady Penton said.

And Ally gave him a look—what did it say? Promises, pledges, a whole world of recompense was in it. He said, with another little laugh of confidence and self-satisfaction, not untouched with emotion, "Yes, I think that's the best way. I'll get him to take me about, I only a country fellow, and he up to all the ways of town; and it will be strange if we don't get to be on confidential terms; and as I feel quite certain he is dying to come home—"

I feel quite certain he is dying to come home—'
"Most likely, most likely," said Sir Edward. It was,
as Rochford felt, touch and go, very delicate work with Sir
Edward. A word too much, a look even, might be enough
to remind Walter's father that he was the head of the house
of Penton, and that this was only his man of business.

The young lawyer was acute enough to see that, and wise enough to restrain the natural desire to enlarge upon what he could do, which the intoxication of feminine belief which was round him encouraged and called forth. He subdued himself with a self-denial which was very worthy of credit, but which no one gave him any credit for. And by this time the afternoon was spent, darkness coming on, and it was necessary he should go home: he felt this to be expedient in the state of affairs, though it was hard to go without a word from Ally, without a moment of that more intimate consultation, all in the erring brother's interests, which yet drew these two so much closer together. "I will come this way," he said, as they all went with him to the door where the dog-cart was standing, "to-morrow, on my way to town, to see if there are any last directionsanything you wish to suggest, Sir Edward—anything that may occur to you in the meantime, which I might carry

"Yes, perhaps that will be well," Sir Edward said.

"To go direct from you will give me so much more in-

"Yes, yes," he said impatiently. It was very delicate work with Sir Edward. "Telegraph if I'm wanted. Of course I am ready—whatever is wanted."

"And you will let us know at once, oh, at once, Mr. Rochford; you know how anxious, though foolishly, as you

"Not foolishly," the young man said, pressing Lady Pen ton's hand. He was very sorry for her wistful, tremulous looks, though his heart was bounding with satisfaction and elation in his own prospects. "Not foolishly," he half whispered, "but soon to be over. I think I can promise you that—I feel sure I can promise you that."
"God bless you!" said Walter's mother, "and reward

you, for I can't-oh, if you bring me back my boy, Mr.

"I will," he cried, but still in a whisper. "I will! and you can reward me, dear Lady Penton." He kissed her hand in his emotion, which is a salutation very unusual in mild English households, and brought a little thrill, a sensation of solemnity, and strangeness, and possibilities unconceived, to her startled consciousness. Ally could not speak at all. She was half concealed in her mother's shadow, clinging to her, still more full of strange sweet excitement and emotion. Her young eyelids seemed to weigh down her eyes. She could not look at him, but his words seemed to murmur in her ears and dwell there, returning over and over again, "You can reward me." Ally at least, now, if not before, knew how.

"You've got a good horse there," said Sir Edward, mechanically stroking the shining neck of the impatient

animal, "you'll not be long on the road."

"No, she goes well; to-morrow then, sir, early."

"As early as you please—you'll have a cold drive. Thank you, Rochford." He put out his hand to the young man with a hasty touch just as Rochford took the reins, and then turned away and shut himself up in his bookroom, while the others stood watching the dash of the mare, the sudden awakening of sound in the silence, the glimmer of the lamp as the cart flew along the drive. Sir Edward retired to think it over by his dull afternoon fire, which was not made up till after tea. The night had fallen, but he did not immediately light his candles. He bent down over the dull red glow to think it over. His mind was relieved, there seemed now some possibility that this miserable anxiety might be over. But even though his object may be gained by other means, a man does not like to fail in his own person, and the chill of unsuccess was in his heart. Rochford, his man of business! well, princes themselves have to seek help from men of business. It was his trade to find out things. It was in the way of his profession that he should succeed. But then had not his ear caught something about a reward—a reward! what reward? except his charges, of course. A new contrariety came into Sir Edward's mind, though he could not define it. He had not at all an agreeable half hour as he sat thinking it over in that dull moment before tea, over the dull book-room fire.

CHAPTER XLII.

A NEW AGENT.

ALLY was up very early next morning. She was always early. In a house with so many little children and so few servants, if you were not up early you were in arrears with

your work the whole day. That was her conviction always, but on many occasions, especially on dark winter mornings, it did not carry the same practical force. This day she was more certain of the necessity than ever. She scolded Anne for not sharing it, but so softly that Anne fell asleep in the middle of the little lecture. And Ally knew very well that nothing could be done, that no one could come so very early as this was. But still her mind was in great agitation, and it did her good to be up and about. About Walter? She had been very unhappy about Walter, full of distress and trouble, her heart beating at every sound, thinking of nothing else. But to-day she was, to say the least, a little more at ease about her brother. Last night they had all been more at their ease, so much so that Lady Penton had begun to talk a little about the removal, and the new furniture that would be required, and the many expenses and advantages, such as they were, of the new establishment. The expenses were what Lady Penton was most sensible of. For her own part, perhaps the advantages did not seem advantages to her. She was satisfied with the Hook. What did she want with Penton? But, at all events, she had been able to think of all this, to change the one persistent subject which had occupied her mind. And perhaps this was what had set Ally's mind afloat. She was glad to be quite alone to think it all over, notwithstanding that Martha looked at her with no agreeable glances as she came into the dining-room before the fire was lighted.

"I just overslep' myself, Miss Alice," said Martha. "With helping to wash up down-stairs, and helping to get the nursery straight upstairs, a body has no time for sleep."

"It does not matter at all, Martha," said Ally with fervor, "I only thought I should like to arrange the books a little."

"Oh, if that's all, miss," Martha said, graciously accepting the excuse.

But even Martha was a hinderance to Ally's thoughts. She made herself very busy collecting the picture-books with which the children made up for the want of their usual walks on wet days, and which they were apt to leave about the dining-room, and ranging them all in a row on

the shelf while Martha concluded her work. But as soon as she was alone Ally's arms dropped by her side and her activity ceased. She had put away her thoughts in Martha's presence, as she had done in Anne's and in her mother's, keeping them all for her own enjoyment; but now that she was alone she could take them out and look at them. After all, they were not thoughts at all, they were recollections, anticipations, they were a sort of soft intoxication, delirium, a state too sweet to be real, yet which somehow was real-more real than the most commonplace and prosaic things. To be alone, how delightful it was, even with the fire only half alight, and reluctant to begin the work of the day, and Martha's duster still before her. She leaned her arms on the mantel-piece and bent her head down upon them and shut her eyes. She could see best when she shut her eyes. Had any one been there Ally could not thus have shut herself up in that magical world. Her hands were rather blue with cold, if truth must be told, but she was aware of nothing but an atmosphere of warmth and softness, full of golden reflections and a haze of inarticulate happiness. She had forgotten all about that momentary movement of pride, of hesitation, which she had afterward called by such hard names, but which at the moment had been real enough; that sensation of being Miss Penton of Penton, in the presence of Mrs. Rochford and her daughter. Both the sin and the repentance had faded out of Ally's mind. She did not ask herself anything about her suitor, whether he would satisfy her father, whether he would be thought of importance equal to the new claims of the family. Ally had gone beyond this stage, she remembered none of these things. only external matters which affected her were the facts that for her sake he was going out into the world to bring back her brother, and that the whole horizon round her was the brighter for this enterprise. Naturally her thoughts gave it a far graver character than it possessed. It seemed something like the work of a knight-errant, an effort of selfsacrifice beautiful and terrible. He was about to leave his home, to plunge into that seething world of London, of which she had heard so many appalling things, for her brother's, nay, for her sake. She thought of him as wandering through streets more miserable than any of the bewildering dark forests of romance. In short, all the anguish

of such a search as she had read of in heart-rending stories occurred to Ally's mind. And all this he was doing for her. It gave her a pang of delightful suffering more sweet than enjoyment, that he should be so good, so brave, and that it should be all for her.

Meantime young Rochford prepared, with a little trouble, it must be said, to absent himself from his business for a few days; he thought that certainly this time must be required for a mission that might not be an easy one; for if he did not know, as he said, that such escapades were the commonest thing in the world among young men, he knew very well that to bring back a young culprit was not easily accomplished, and made up his mind that he would want both courage and patience for his task. As a matter of fact, he had no idea of Walter's motive, or of the "entanglement' which had drawn him away. He was willing enough to believe in an entanglement, but not in one so innocent and blameless; and he believed that the youth had plunged into the abyss with the curiosity and passion of youth, to feel what was to be felt and to see what was to be seen, and to make a premature dash at that tree of the knowledge of evil which has so wonderful and bitter a charm. He was ready to take a great deal of trouble for the deliverance of the boy, though not without a little shake of his head at the thought of the other young Pentons who had also taken that plunge and whom it had not been possible to rescue. He had heard his father tell how many efforts Sir Walter had made to save his sons, and with how little effect. Did it perhaps run in the blood? But Rochford was fully determined to do his best, and confident, as became a fighter in that good cause, that whoever failed, he at least would succeed. And it was quite possible that he might have been willing to help these poor people (as he called them to himself) and save the unfortunate boy, if he had not loved Ally. He was generously sorry for them all, notwithstanding his consciousness of the enormous advantage likely to spring to himself from what he could do for them. He would have done it, he thought—if they had asked him, or even if it had come evidently in his way-for them; and certainly he would have done it for Ally's brother, whosoever that brother might have been to recommend himself to the girl he loved. There could be no doubt upon that subject. The complication which nade it

so infinitely useful to him to make himself useful in this way, because the girl he loved was the eldest daughter of Sir Edward Penton, and more or less out of his sphere, was after all a secondary matter-and yet it could not be denied that it was very important too. He said to himself that he would have chosen Ally from the world had she been a poor curate's daughter, a poor governess, a nobody. But at the same time he could not but be aware that to marry Miss Penton was a great thing for him, and worth a great deal of trouble to bring about. Perhaps a man's feelings in the matter of his love are never so unalloyed as a girl's, to whom the love itself is everything, and with whom the circumstances tell for nothing. Or perhaps this depends upon the circumstances themselves, since a girl too has many calculations to make and much to take into consideration when she is called upon to advance herself and her family by a fortunate marriage. Rochford could not help feeling that such a connection would be a fine thing: but it was not for the connection that Ally was dear to him. He thought of her in his way with subdued rapture really stronger and more passionate, though not so engrossing, as her own, as he dashed along the river-side, his mare almost flying, his heart going faster, beating with the hope of a meeting with Ally before he should see her father—before he set off upon his mission. If Ally loved him she would find the means, he thought, to give him that recompense for his devotion; and sure enough, as he came in sight of the gate, he became aware also of a little slim figure gathering the first snow-drops in the shadow of the big laurel bushes that screened the little drive. He flung the reins to his groom and leaped out of the cart, at imminent risk of startling the other nervous, highly organized animal, who had carried him along so swiftly; but what did he care for that or any other risk? In a moment, shutting the gate behind him gingerly, notwithstanding his headlong haste, that nobody might be aware of his arrival, he was by Ally's side.

"You are gathering flowers, Miss Penton, already!"

"Oh, Mr. Rochford, is it you? Yes; they are earlier here than anywhere. They are only snow-drops, after all."

She looked not unlike a snow-drop herself, with a white wrapper wound round her throat, and her head, which drooped a little—but not till after she had recognized him

with a rapid glance and an overwhelming momentary blush which left her pale.

"I could think there would be always flowers wherever

you trod," he said.

"That's poetry," she replied, with a little tremulous laugh, in which there was excitement and a little nervous shivering from the cold. "It must have been you I heard galloping along," she added, hurriedly, "like the wind. Are you in haste for the train?"

"I was in haste, hoping for a word with you before I

started.' Two etirw blood and visall it amilt

"My father is expecting you, Mr. Rochford."

"Yes; I did not mean your father. Won't you say a kind word to me before I go?"

"Oh, if I could only thank you as I should like! Mr.

Rochford, I do with my whole heart."

"It is not thanks I want," he said. "Ally—don't be ry with me—if I come back—with—your brother."

Oh, Mr. Rochford, we will all—I don't know what to

say-bless you!"

"I don't want blessing; nor is it the others I am think-

ing of. Ally, are you angry?"

He had taken in his own her cold hands, with the snow-drops in them, and was bending over them. Ally trembled so that she let her flowers fall, but neither of them paid any attention. He did not say he loved her, or anything of that kind, which perhaps the girl expected; but he said, "Ally, are you angry?" once more.

"Ally, are you angry?" once more.

"Oh, no," she said, in a voice that was no more than a whisper: and then the sound of a step upon the gravel

made them start asunder.

It was Sir Edward, who had heard the dog-cart coming along the curve by the river, and who, restless in his anxiety, had come forth to see who it was. Both Rochford and Ally stooped down after that little start of separation to pick up the fallen flowers, and then once more their hands touched, and the same whisper, so meaningless yet so full of meaning, was exchanged—"If you are not angry, give them to me, Ally!"

Angry? no; why should she be angry? She gave him the snow-drops out of her hand, and while he ran up to meet her father was thankful to have the chance of stooping to gather up the rest. It was not so much, after all,

that he had said; nothing but her name—Ally—and "Are you angry?" At what should she be angry?—because he had called her by her name? It had never sounded so sweetly, so soft, in her ears before.

"Yes, I am on my way to the station. I came to see if you had any instructions for me; if there was any—news, before I go."

"I don't see how there could be any news," said Sir Edward, who had relapsed into something of his old irritation. "I didn't expect any news. If he did not write at first, do you think it likely he would write now?"

"He might do so any day; every day makes it more likely that he should do so," said Rochford, "in my opinion." Ah, you think more favorably than I do," said the fa-

ther, shaking his head, but he was mollified by the words. He went on shaking his head. "As long as he can get on there I don't expect him to write. I don't expect him to come back. I don't think you'll find him ever so easi. I is you suppose. But still, you can try; I have no objection that you should try."

"Then there is nothing more to say beyond what we

settled last night?"

"Nothing that I can think of. His mother, of course, would have messages to send; she would wish you to tell him that she was anxious, and feared his falling ill, and all that; but I don't pretend to be unhappy about his health or—anything of that sort," said Sir Edward, hoarsely, with a wave of his hand. "You can tell him from me that he'd better come home at once; we'll be removing presently. He had best be here when we take possession of Penton; he had best—be here— But you know very well what to say—that is, if you find him," he added, with a harsh little laugh, "which you won't find so easy as you think."

"I don't suppose it will be easy," said Rochford; "but if it can be done I'll do it. I'll stay till I've done it. I shall not return without some news."

"Ah, well; go, go. You are full of confidence, you young men. You think you've but to say 'come,' and he will come. You'll know better when you are as old—as old as I am. Good-bye, then, if you are going. You'll look in as you come back?"

"I shall come here direct, sir: and telegraph as soon as

I have anything to say."

"Good-bye, then," said Sir Edward, stretching out his hand. He held Rochford for a moment, shaking his hand in a tremulous way. Then he said, "It must be inconvenient, leaving all your business, going away on this wildgoose chase."

"If it were ever so inconvenient I shouldn't mind."

He kept swinging the young man's hand, with a pressure which seemed every moment as though he would throw it away; then he murmured in his throat, "God bless you, then!" and dropped it, and turned back toward the house.

Rochford was left standing once more by the side of Ally, with her hands full of snow-drops, who had followed every word of this little colloquy with rapt attention. The flowers she had given him were carefully inclosed in his left hand; they were a secret between his love and him. He did not unfold them even for her to see. "Walk with me to the gate," he said, in a voice which was half entreaty and half command. He held out his arm to her, and she took it. The little authority, the air of appropriation, was sweet to her as she thought no flattery could have been.

"He will be against me," said Rochford, holding her hand close, bending over her in the shade of the laurels. "And I don't wonder. But if I come back successful perhaps they will think me worthy of a reward. Ally, dar-ling, you thank me for going, when it is all mercenary, for my own interest—''

"Oh, no, no-no."

"It is-to win you. I am not good enough for you, I know that, but I can not give up this dear hope. Will you stand by me if they refuse?"

She made no reply. How could she make any reply? She held his arm tight, and drooped her head. She had never stood against them in her life. She was aghast at the thought. Everything in life had been plain to her till now. But her eyes were dazzled with the sudden new light, and the possibility of darkness coming after it. The confusion of betrothal, refusal, delight, dismay, all coming together, bewildered her inexperienced soul. "No, no, no," she murmured; "oh, no; they will never be against us." "No," he cried, in subdued tones of triumph; "not

against us, if you will stand by me. Ally! then it is you

and I against the world!"

And then there was the glitter and glimmer before her eyes, the impatient mare tossing her nervous head, the wintery sun gleaming in the harness, in the horse's sleek coat, in the varnish of the dog-cart: and then the sudden rush of sound, and all was gone like a dream. Like a dream-like a sudden phantasmagoria, in which she too had been a vision like the rest, and heard and saw and done and said things inconceivable. To turn back after that on everything that was so familiar and calm, to remember that she must go and put into water the snow-drops, which were already dropping limp in the hand that he had kissed -that she must face them all in the preoccupation of her thoughts—was almost as wonderful to Ally as this wonderful moment that was past. "You and I against the world." And those other shorter words that meant so little apparently, "Ally-you are not angry?" kept murmuring and floating about her, making an atmosphere round her. Would the others hear her when she went in? That fear seized upon Ally as she drew near the door, coming slowly, slowly along the path. They would hear the words, "Ally, are you angry?" but would they know what that meant? she said to herself in her dream as she reached the door. No, no; they might hear them, but they would not understand—that was her secret between her love and her. To think that in such little words, that look so innocent, everything could be said!

But nobody took any notice of Ally when she went in at last. They were all occupied with their own affairs, and with the one overpowering sentiment which made them insensible to other things. Ally went into the midst of them with her secret in her eyes like a lamp in a sanctuary, but they never perceived it. She put her snow-drops in water, all but two or three which she took to her room with her, feeling them too sacred even to be worn, even to be left for Anne to see. But where could she put them to keep them secret? She had no secret places to keep anything in, nor had she ever known what it was to have a secret in all her

innocent life. How, oh, how was she to keep this?

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struck by a recollection, and then wound, up with a sigh

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As a matter of fact she did not keep it at all.

The others were very anxious, lost in their thoughts, their minds all quivering with anxiety and hope and fear, but still there were moments when the tension relaxed a little. It was very highly strung at first while the excitement of Rochford's departure and of Sir Edward's encounter with him was still in the air, but by degrees this died away, and a sense of increased serenity, of greater hope, released their souls from that bondage. Lady Penton after a long silence began again to talk a little about the new house.

"I don't know what we can do with these poor old things in Penton," she said; "such a beautiful house as it is, everybody says, and so many pretty things in it: and all we have is so shabby. Ally, you are the only one that

has seen it."

"Yes, mother," said Ally, waking up as from a dream.

"What do you think, my dear? you ought to be able to tell me. I suppose there is scarcely a room in the house so small as this?"

"I-don't think I paid any attention."

"No attention!—to a house which was to be our own house."

"But no one thought then it was to be our own house," cried Anne, coming to the rescue. "And you know Ally

did not enjoy it, mother."

"Oh, yes," cried Ally, suddenly waking up, feeling once more the brightness of pleasure that had come with the sight of him; how he had found her neglected and made a princess of her, a little queen! Was it possible that she could ever have forgotten that?

"Well, not at first," said Anne; "you didn't like Cousin Alicia, which I don't wonder at. Mab didn't like her either. Mother, if Mab comes back and insists on

coming to live with us, what shall you do?"

"I wish you would not be so nonsensical," said Lady Penton, with a little vexation, "when I was talking of the

furniture. Why should Mab-" she paused a moment, struck by a recollection, and then wound up with a sigh and a shake of her head. "Why should not Walter have a try?" The words came back to her mind vaguely, just clear enough to arouse a keener consciousness of the prevailing subject which her mind had put aside for the moment. Ah! poor Wat! poor Wat! how could his mother think or speak of anything while his fate hung in the balance? But then she reflected on the new agent who had been sent out into the world in search of him, a young man who knew the ways of young men. This reflection gave her more comfort than anything. She clung to the idea that young men spoke a language of their own among themselves, and that only they understood each other's way. She resumed with another sigh.

"I don't suppose we have anything in our possession that is fit to be put into the drawing-room, Ally. I remember it in old days, the very few times I ever was there: but they say it is far more splendid now than it was before. Do you think that chiffonier would do?" The chiffonier had been the pride of Lady Penton's heart. It was inlaid, and had a plate-glass back. She looked at it fondly where it stood, not very brilliant in fact, but making the shabby things around look a little more shabby. She had always felt it was thrown away amid these surroundings, and that to see it in a higher and better sphere would be sweet and consolatory; but Lady Penton was aware that taste had changed greatly since that article was constructed, and that perhaps the decorations of the great drawing-room at Penton might be out of harmony with a meuble belonging to another generation, however beautiful it might be in itself.

"I—don't know," said Ally, looking at the well-known article with her dreamy eyes; "there was nothing like it—I think: I didn't notice—"

"You don't seem to have noticed anything, my dear,"

her mother said.

Oh, if Ally could but say what it was that had been most delightful to her at Penton! But then she remembered with overpowering shame how she had shrunk from the ladies who had been so good to her; how she had felt the elation of her new superiority; how she had been a snob in all the horror of the word. And she was silent, crushed by remorse and confusion. Fortunately Lady Penton's mind was taken up by other things.

"I think," she said, "the chiffonier will do. It is large, too large, for this little room; it will fill one side of the wall very nicely. And perhaps some of the chairs, if they are newly covered; but as for curtains and carpets and all that, everything must be new. It is dreadful to think of the expense. I don't know how we are ever to meet it. Ally, what sort of carpets are there now? Oh, no doubt beautiful Persian rugs and that sort of thing-simple Brussels would not do. Is it a polished floor with rugs, or is it one of those great carpets woven in one piece, or is it-My dear, what's the matter? There is no need to cry."

"I-don't remember-it is so stupid of me," said Ally,

with the tears in her eyes.

"You are nervous and upset this morning; but we must all try and take a little courage. I have great confidence in Mr. Rochford—oh, great confidence! He is very kind and so trustworthy. You can see that only to look into

those nice kind eyes."

"Oh, mother dear!" cried Ally, flinging her arms about Lady Penton's neck, giving her a sudden kiss. And then the girl slid away, flying upstairs as soon as she was safely out of sight, to cry with happiness in her own room where nobody could see.

"There is something the matter with Ally this morning," said her mother; "she is not like herself."
"She is not at all like herself," said Anne, with a little pursing up of her lips, as one who should say, "I could an I would."

"What do you think it is, Anne? Do you know of any-

"I don't know," said Anne, "but I guess. Mother-I think it's Mr. Rochford."

"Mr. Rochford!" Lady Penton replied; and then in a moment the whole passed before her like a panorama. How could she have been so dull? It had occurred to her as possible before old Sir Walter's death, and she had not been displeased. Now things were different; but still—
"What will your father say?" she exclaimed. "Oh, I am
afraid I have been neglecting Ally thinking of her brother.
What will your father say?" "If that sort of thing is going to be," said Anne, sententiously, "do you think anything can stop it, mother? I have always heard that the more you interfere the stronger

it becomes. It has to be if it's going to be."

Lady Penton did not make any reply to this wisdom, but she was greatly moved. First Walter and then Ally! The children become independent actors in life, choosing their own parts for good, or, alas! perhaps for evil. She stole upstairs after a little interval and softly opened the door of Ally's room, where the girl was sitting half crying, smiling, lost in the haze of novelty and happiness: her mother looked at her for a moment before she said anything to make her presence known. Ah, yes, it was very clear Ally had escaped, she had gone away from the household in which she was born, the cares and concerns of which had hitherto been all the world to her, into another sphere, a different place, a little universe of her own, peopled but by the two, the beginners of a new world. Lady Penton stood unseen, contemplating the girl's dreamy countenance, so abstracted from all about her with a complication of new and strange emotions. Her little girl! but now separate, having taken the turn that made her life a thing apart from father and mother. The child! who had in a moment become a woman, an individual with her fate and future all her own. The interest of it, the pride of it, in some respects the pity of it, touches every maturer soul at such a sight—but when it is a woman looking at her own little girl! She came into the room very softly and sat down beside Ally upon the little white bed and put her tender arms about the young creature in her trance; and Ally, with one low cry, "Mother!" flung herself upon the breast which had always been her shelter. And there was an end of the secret—so far as such a secret can be told. The mother did not want any telling, she understood it all. But, notwithstanding her sympathy for her child, and her agreement in Anne's inspiration and conviction that such a thing has to be if it is going to be, she kept reflecting to herself, "What will her father say?" all the time in her heart.

This was destined to be a day of excitement in many ways. Just before the family meal (which Lady Penton, with a sense of all the changes now surging upward in their family life, had begun to speak of with a little timidity as

"the children's dinner") one of the Penton carriages came to the door, and Mab burst in, all smiles and delight. "Am I in time for dinner?" she said. "Oh, Lady Penton, you will let me come to dinner? May I send the carriage away and tell them to come back for me? When must they come back for me? Oh, if you only knew how I should like to stay.' It was very difficult for these kind people to resist the fervor of this petition. "My dear, of course we are very glad to have you," Lady Penton said, with a little hesitation. And Mab plunged into the midst of the children with cries of delight on both sides. Horry possessed himself at once of her hand, and found her a chair close to his own, and even little Molly waved her spoon in the stranger's honor, and changed her little song to "Mady, Mady," instead of the "Fader, fader!" which was the sweetest of dinner-bells to Sir Edward's ears. When dinner was over, Mab got Lady Penton into a corner and poured forth her petition. "Oh, may I come and stay! Uncle Russell is going away, and Aunt Alicia is not at all fond of me. She would not like it if I went with them, and where can I go? My relations are none of them so nice as you. You took me in out of kindness when I didn't know where to go. I have a lot of money, Lady Penton, they say, but I am a poor little orphan girl all the same."

"Oh, my dear," said Lady Penton, "nobody could be more sorry than I am; and a lot of money does not do very much good to a little girl who is alone. But, Mab, I have so many to think of: and we have not a lot of money, and we have to live accordingly. Though Sir Edward has Penton now, that does not make things better, it rather makes them worse. Even in Penton we shall live very simply, perhaps poorly. We can not give you society and pleasures

like your other friends."

"But I don't want society and pleasure. Pleasure! I should like to take care of Molly, and make her things and teach her her letters. I should; she is the dearest little darling that ever was. I should like to run about with the boys. Horry and I are great friends, oh, great friends, Lady Penton. At Penton you will have hundreds of rooms; you can't say it is not big enough. Oh, let me come! Oh, let me come! And then my money—' But here Mab judiciously stopped, seeing no room for any con-

'sideration about her money. "You wouldn't turn me from the door if I was a beggar, a little orphan," she cried.

"Oh, my dear! No, indeed, I hope not; but this is very different. Mab, though I am not much set upon money (but I am afraid I am too, for nothing will go without it), yet a rich girl is very different from a poor girl. You know

that as well as I."

"The poor girl is much better off," cried Mab, "for people are kind to her; they take her in, they let her stay, they are always contriving to make her feel at home; but the wretched little rich one is put to the door. People say, 'Oh, we are always glad to see you;' but they are not, Lady Penton! They think, here she comes with her money. As if I cared about my money! Take me for Molly's nurse or her governess. Ally will be going and marrying—"

"What do you know about that?" Lady Penton said,

grasping her arm. The first bender has terrin a statuel

"I! I don't know anything about it; but of course she will, and so will Anne; and it might happen that you would be glad to have me, just to look after the children a little after the weddings were over, and help you with Molly. Oh, you might, Lady Penton, it is quite possible; and then you would find out that I am not a little good-for-nothing. I believe I am really clever with children," Mab cried, flinging herself down on her knees, putting her arms about

Lady Penton's waist. "Oh, say that I may stay."

When she had thus flung herself upon Lady Penton's lap, Mab suddenly raised her round rosy cheek to the pale one that bent over her. They were by themselves in a corner of the drawing-room, and nobody was near. She said in a whisper, close to the other's ear, "I saw Mr. Penton in town yesterday. He was looking quite well, but sad. I was—oh, very impertinent, Lady Penton. Forgive me. I stopped the carriage, though I am sure he did not want to speak to me. I told him that you were not—quite well—that you were so pale—and that everybody missed him so. Don't be angry! I was very impertinent, Lady Penton. And he said he was going home directly—directly, that was what he said. I said you would be sure not to tell him in your letters that you were feeling ill, but that you were. And so you are, Lady Penton; you are so pale. But he is coming directly, that was what he said."

"Oh, my little Mab!" Lady Penton cried. She gave the little girl a sudden kiss, then put her hands with a soft resoluteness upon Mab's arms and loosed their clasp. It was as if the girl had pushed open for a moment a door which closed upon her again the next. "Yes," she said, "my son is coming home. He has stayed a little longer than we expected, but you should not have tried to frighten him about his mother. I am not ill. If he comes rushing back before his business is done, because you have frightened him about me, what shall we do to you, you little prophet of evil?" She stooped again and kissed the girl, giving her a smile as well. But then she rose from her seat. "As soon as we get in to Penton you must come and pay us a long visit," she said.

And this made an end of Mab's attempt to interfere in the affairs of the family of which she was so anxious to become a member. She went away to the children with her head hanging, and in a somewhat disconsolate condition. But, being seized upon by Horry, who had a great manufacture of boats on hand, and wanted some one to make the sails for him, soon forgot, or seemed to forget, the trouble, and became herself again. "I am coming to live with you

when you go to Penton," she said.

"Hurrah! Mab is coming to live with us!" shouted the little boys, and soon this great piece of news ran over the house.

"Mad's tumming! Mad's tumming!" little Molly joined

in with her little song.

And this new proposal, which was so strange and unlikely, and which the elder members looked upon so dubiously, was carried by acclamation by the little crowd, so to speak, of the irresponsible populace—the children of the house.

The day had been an exhausting day. When the winter afternoon fell there was throughout the house more than usual of that depressed and despondent feeling which is natural to the hour and the season. Even Mab's going contributed to this sensation. The hopefulness of the morning, when all had felt that the sending out of the new agent meant deliverance from their anxiety, had by this time begun to sink into the dreary waiting to which no definite period is put, and which may go on, so far as any one knows, day after day. Sir Edward had withdrawn to the book-room, very sick at heart and profoundly disappointed,

disgusted even not to have had a telegram, which he had expected from hour to hour the entire day. Rochford had not found Walter, then, though he was so confident in his superior knowledge. After all, he had sped no better than other people. There was a certain solace in this, but yet a dreary, dreadful disappointment. He sat over his fire, crouching over it with his knees up to his chin, cold with the chill of nervous disquietude and anxiety, listening, as the ladies had done so long—listening for the click of the gate, for a step on the gravel—for anything that might denote the coming of news, the news which he had never been able to bring himself, but which Rochford had been so sure

of sending, only, as it seemed, to fail.

Lady Penton was in the drawing-room. She spent this dull hour often with her husband, but to-day she did not go to him. She could not have been with him and keep Ally's secret, and she was loath to give him the additional irritation of this new fact in the midst of the trouble of the old. She said to herself that if Rochford succeeded in his search, if he sent news, if he brought Walter home, that then everything would be changed; and in gratitude for such a service his suit might be received. She did not wish to expose that suit to an angry objection now. Poor lady! she had nore motives than one for this reticence. She would not make Ally unhappy, and she would not permit anything to be said or done that might lessen the energy of the lover who felt his happiness to depend on his success. It was because of her habit of spending this hour between the lights in the book-room with her husband that she was left alone in the partial dark, before the lamp was brought or the curtains drawn. She had gone close to the window when it was too dark to work at the table, but now her work had dropped on her lap, and she was doing nothing. Doing nothing! with so much to think of, so many, many things to take into consideration. She sat and looked out on the darkening skies, the pale fading of the light, the dull whiteness of the horizon, and the blackness of the trees that rose against it. The afternoon chill was strong upon her heart; she had been disappointed too-she too had been looking for that telegram, and her heart had sunk lower and lower as the night came on. That Walter should be found was what her heart prayed and longed for, and now there was another reason, for Ally's sake, that the lover might claim

his reward. But the day was nearly over, and, so far as could be told, the lover, with all his young energy, was as unsuccessful as Edward himself. So far as this went, their thoughts were identical, but Lady Penton's, if less sad, were more complicated, and took in a closer net-work of wishes and hopes. She sat at the window and looked out blankly, now and then putting up her hand to dry her eyes. She could cry quietly to herself in the dark, which

is a relief a man can not have.

What a sad house! with heavy anxiety settling down again, and the shadow of the night, in which even the deliverer can not work, nor telegrams come. There was a spark of warmer life upstairs, where the girls had lighted their candle, and where the tremendous secret which had come to Ally was being shyly contemplated by both girls together in wonder of so great and new a thing. And on the nursery there was plenty of cheerfulness and din. But down-stairs all was very quiet, the father and mother in different rooms thinking the same thoughts. Lady Penton wept out those few tears very quietly. There was no sound to betray them. It had grown very dark in the room and her eyes were fixed on the wan light that lingered outside. She had no hope now for a telegram. He would not send one so late. He must have written instead of telegraphing. He had found nothing, that was clear.

She had said this to herself for the hundredth time, and had added for perhaps the fiftieth that it was time to go and dress, that it was of no use lingering, looking for something that never came, that she had now a double reason to be calm, to have patience, to take courage, when it seemed to her that something, a dark speck, flitted across the pale light outside. This set her heart beating again. Could it be the dispatch after all? She listened, her heart jumping up into her ears. Oh! who was it? Nothing? Was it nothing? There was no sound. Yes, a hurried rustle, a faint stir in the hall. She rose up. Telegraph boys make a great noise, they send the gravel flying, they beat wild drums upon the door. Now there was nothing, or only a something fluttering across the window, the faintest stir at the open door.

What was it? a hand upon the handle turning it doubtfully, slowly; then it was pushed open. Oh, no; no telegraph boy. She flew forward with her whole heart in her outstretched hands. Some one stood in the dark, looking in, saying nothing, only half visible, a shadow, no more. "Wat! WAT!" the mother cried.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE FINAL BLOW.

What does it matter what a mother says? especially when she is a powdered and pomaded woman like Mrs. Sam Crockford, altogether unable to comprehend, much less interpret, the fair and brilliant creature who is her daughter. How strange that anything so sweet and delightful as Emmy should come from such a woman-one from whom the heart recoiled, who was offensive to every sense, with those white, unwholesome, greasy hands, the powder, the scent, the masses of false hair, the still falser and more dreadful smile. Walter said to himself as he left her with that nausea which always overwhelmed him at the sight of her, that he would not take what she said as having anything to do with Emmy. No; her existence was a sort of an offense to Emmy; it might, if that were possible, throw a cloud over her perfection, it might make a superficial admirer pause to think, could she ever in her young beauty come to be like that? A superficial admirer, Walter said to himself—not, of course, a true lover such as he was, to whom the suggestion was odious and abominable. Like that! oh, never, never! for Emmy had soul, she had heart in her loveliness; never could the actress have resembled her, never could she resemble the actress. He wondered if that woman could be her mother. Such people stole children, they got hold of them in strange ways. Emmy might have been taken in her childhood from some poor mother of a very different kind. She might have strayed away from her home and been found by vagrants: anything rather than believe that she was that woman's daughter, who, to crown all her artificialities, was mercenary too. Or even if it might really be so, what did it matter? is there not often no resemblance between the mother and the child, the mother elderly, faded, meretricious, trying hard to keep up an antiquated display of dreadful charms, seductions that filled the mind with loathing; the daughter, oh, so different, so young and fresh, so full of youth and sweet-

ness and everything that is delightful, everything that is most fascinating. When he thought of Emmy the young man's heart, which had been so outraged, grew soft again. If it came to a decision, how very different would Emmy's deliverance be. Yet Emmy had discouraged him too, she had thought of secondary things. She had been sorry that he should lose anything for her sake, he who was so ready to lose all. She had even scoffed a little sweetly at his fortune, the ten thousand pounds, which would not, she declared, be more than four hundred a year. Four hundred a year would be plenty, Walter thought; they could live somewhere quietly in the depths of the country enjoying each other's society, desiring nothing else to make them happy. Would Emmy care for that? she who so loved London. A number of people loved London so, did not know what to do out of it, people who were the very best, the most highly endowed of all, poets, philosophers-it was no reproach to her that she should be among that number. He was not one of them himself, but then he was, he knew, a dull fellow, a rustic. Poor Walter went about the streets all day thinking these thoughts. He knew he was not so clever as she was; but yet they had always understood each other: not like that dreadful woman whom nothing could make him understand. He would not accept her decision whatever she said—he would not believe her even—probably what she had said about his father was untrue; how should his father have got there? No, no, it was not true, any more than it was true that Emmy had permitted her mother to interfere. There was some one else whom the old woman preferred, he said, miserably, to himself, and that was the entire cause of it, not that Emmy meant to cast him off-oh no, no!

But it was two or three days after this before he succeeded in seeing her. Either there was a conspiracy on her mother's part, into which she, guileless, fell, or else the mother had acquired an ascendency over her, and was able to curb the natural instincts, to restrain the sweeter impulses of her daughter. That it could be Emmy's fault he would not allow. He haunted the place morning and evening, and on Saturday afternoon, which had been his moment of bliss. It was on that day that he met her at last. He met her hurrying out, dressed as she usually was when he was allowed to take her to the country or to make some

expedition with her. She had just stopped to call out something before closing the door, about the hour of her return—he thought he heard her say nine o'clock, and it was little past noon. She was going somewhere, then, but not with him. He turned after her as she went lightly along, with the easy skimming step which he had so often compared to every poetic movement under heaven. It filled him with despair to see it now, and to feel that she was going along like this, upon some other expedition, not in his company, though she must know to what darkness of despondence and solitude she was leaving him. "Emmy," he cried, hurrying after her. He thought she started a little, but only quickened her pace. She was not, however, to escape him so—that was a vain expectation on her part. He quickened his pace too, and came up to her, close to her, and caught at her elbow in his eagerness and impatience. She turned round upon him with a face very unlike that which had so often smiled upon the foolish boy. She plucked her arm away from his touch. with a tone of annoyance, "you here!" "Oh," she said,

"Where should I be, Emmy, but where you are? You

were going to send for me, to meet me—"
She looked at him with impatience. "No," she said,
"I wasn't going to do anything of the kind; I have got

something very different to do."

"I have always been ready to do whatever you wanted," he said, "to go where you pleased, and you know this has been my reward—this Saturday afternoon, after waiting, waiting, day by day-"

"Who wanted you to wait? Mr. Penton, that was your doing. You must understand that I'm not going to be

made a slave to you."

"A slave," cried the poor boy, "to me!"

"Well, what is it better? I can't move a step but you are at my heels. What I've always held by is doing what I like and going where I like. I never could put up with bondage and propriety like some people; but you dog my steps, you watch everything I do—"
"Emmy!"

"Well, is that all you have to say? Emmy! yes, that's my name; but you can't crush me by saying 'Emmy!' to me," she said, with a little breathless gasp, as of one who had seized the opportunity to work herself up into a fit of

calculated impatience. She stopped here, perhaps moved by his pale face, and ended by a little laugh of ridicule.

"Well, that's natural enough, don't you think?"

"I don't know what is natural," he said. "I have thrown off all that. Emmy, are you going to abandon me after all?"

"After all!—after what? I suppose you mean after all the great things you've done for me? What has it been, Mr. Penton? You've followed me here, you've watched me that I couldn't take a step, or speak a word. No, I am not going with you any more. You must just make up your mind to it, Mr. Walter Penton. I've got other things in hand. I've other-I've-well, let us be vulgar," she cried, with a wild little laugh, "I've got other fish to

The poor young fellow kept his eyes fixed upon her-

eyes large with dismay and trouble.

"You are not going with me any more! You can't mean

it!—you don't mean it, Emmy!"

"But I do. It's been all nonsense and romance and folly. I didn't mind just for amusement. But do you think I am going to let you, with next to nothing, and expectations—expectations! what could your expectations be? -your father may live for a century! Do you think I'm going to let you stand in my way, and keep me from what's better? No—and no again and again. I mean nothing of the sort. I mean what's best for myself. I am not going with you any more."

"Not going with me!" he said, in a voice of misery;

"then what is to become of me?—what am I to do?"

"Oh, you'll do a hundred things," she said, tapping him on the arm; "go home, for one thing, and make your peace. It's far better for you. It's been folly for you as well as me. Go and take care of your ten thousand pounds. Ten thousand pounds! What do you think of as much as that a year? Take care of it, and you'll get a nice little income out of it, just enough for a young man about town. And don't be tyrannized over by your people, and don't let any one say a word about marrying. You're too young to be married. I'm your only real friend, Walter. Yes, I am. I tell you, don't think of marrying—why should you marry?—but just have your fling and get a little fun while you can. That's my last advice to you."

He walked on with her mechanically, not able to speak, until she got impatient of the silent figure stalking by her

side, struck dumb with youthful passion and misery.

She stopped suddenly and confronted him with hasty determination. "You're not," she said, "coming another

step with me!"

"Where am I to go? what am I to do? I have lived," he cried, "only for you!"

"Then it's time to stop that!" she said. "Go awaygo clean away; it will—it will damage me if you're seen with me! Now there, that's the truth! I was so silly as to allow it for your sake before, now I've learned better. Mr. Penton, it will be harming me if you come another step. Now, do you understand?"

Did he understand? He stopped, and gazed at her with his blank face. "It will be harming you! But you belong to me, you are going to be my wife!"

"No, no, no!" she cried; "that is all folly; I never meant it. Good-bye, and for Heaven's sake go away, go

away!"

She gave an alarmed glance round toward the end of the street. It seemed to Walter that he too saw something vaguely—a tall spidery outline, a high phaeton, or something of the sort. She broke into a little run suddenly, waving her hand to him. "Good-bye!" she cried; "good-bye; go away!" and left him standing stupefied with wonder, with incredulous conviction, if such words can be put together. He felt in the depths of his heart that she had abandoned him, but he could not believe it. No, he could not believe it, though he knew it was true. A sort of instinct of chivalry lingered in the poor lad's heart, wrung and bleeding as it was. He could not harm her, he could not spy on her, he could not interfere with her will, whatever she might do to him. He turned his back upon the spidery tall phaeton. If that was the thing that was to carry her away from him he would not spy, he would not put himself in her way. So long as she did what she liked best! He turned with his heart bleeding, yet half stupefied with trouble, and walked away.

Poor Walter walked and walked all the rest of the afternoon; he did not know where he went or how, his mind was stupid with suffering. And then came Sunday, when without her the blank was more complete than on any other

day. He had not the heart even to seek another interview. On Sunday afternoon he went past the house, and the high phaeton stood at the door. What more could be said? And yet another day or two passed, he did not know how many, before Mab stopped the little brougham in which she was driving and called to him in the street as he went mooning along with his head down in dull and helpless de-

spondency.

"Mr. Penton! Mr. Penton!" The little soft voice calling him roused Walter from the stupor of his despair. He knew nobody in town. It was a wonder to him that any one should know him-should take the trouble to call him. And then Mab's little fresh face stabbed him with innocent cheerful looks. He was not learned enough to know that these innocent looks knew a great deal, and suspected much more harm than existed, in their precocious society knowledge. Durals ti

Mab was bent upon doing what she could to bring him back, and she fully realized all the difficulty; but she looked

like a child delighted to see her country acquaintance. "And oh, how is Lady Penton?" she cried.

"My mother?" gasped Walter, taken altogether by

surprise.

Then Mab told him that little story about Lady Penton's health. "She will of course make light of it when she writes," said the artful little girl. "But oh, she looks so ill and so pale!" (So she does, the little romancer said to herself in her heart; it is quite, quite true!) "Oh, Mr. Penton, do make her see the doctor! do make her take care of herself! You could do it better than any one-because you know the others don't notice the great, great change; they see her every day."

"I will!" cried poor Wat. "Thank you—thank you a thousand times for telling me!"

It gave him a reason for going home, and he did so want a reason, poor boy! His own wretchedness did not seem cause enough; and how was he ever to be forgiven for what he had done? But his mother! He would not wait to think, he would not let himself consider the matter. His mother! And what if she should die! Death had never entered that happy house. It seemed to him the most horrible of all possibilities. He did not even pause to go back to his hotel. Oh, how glad he was of the compulsion, to be thus sent home, to have a reason for going!

He went flying, without taking time for thought.

And when Lady Penton threw herself upon him, calling "Wat, Wat," with that great outcry, he forgot all about his wrong-doing and his need of pardon. He caught her in his arms and cried, "Mother, are you ill?—Mother, are you better?" as if there were no other trouble or anxiety but this in the world.

"Oh, Wat! oh, Wat!" she cried, unable on her side to think of anything but that he had come back and she had him in her arms again: and for a minute or two no more was said. Then he led her tenderly back to a chair and

placed her in it, and knelt down beside her.

"Mother, you have been ill-"

"No; oh, no, my dear.' And then she remembered Mab's little alarm (dear little Mab! if it should be her doing). "At least," she said, "my dearest boy, there is nothing the matter with me that the sight of you will not cure."

"Oh, mother," he cried, "that you should have to say

that, that I should have been the cause-"

"Hush, hush," she said, pressing him to her; "it is

all over, Wat, my own boy. You have come home."

She asked him no questions, she did not even say that he was forgiven; and the youth's heart swelled high. "I think I have been mad," he said.

But she only replied, kissing him, "My own boy, you have come home." And what more was there to be said.

This transport all passed in the dark, with no light in the room except the paleness of twilight in the windows, the dull glow from the fire, which was an ease and softening to the meeting. And then with the lighting of the cheerful lamps the knowledge spread through the house—Wat has come home.

"Already!" cried Ally, with a flush of radiant joy that

was more than for her brother.

"Already," Sir Edward said, with a frown that belied the sudden ease of his heart. To say what that relief was is beyond the power of words. The dark book-room, where he sat with his head in his hands and all the world dark round him, suddenly became light. A load was lifted from his shoulders and from his soul; his mind was freed as from chains. But after that first blessed release and relief a sensation of humiliation, almost of resentment, came into his mind. "Already," he said. He had tramped about London for days and days and found nothing. Rochford

had gone and seen and overcome the same day.

"Edward," said Lady Penton, who, though so still, so tremulous after the prodigal's return, had yet felt the other anxiety spring up as soon as the first was laid, "I am sorry for Mr. Rochford. I fear he was making this the foundation for a great many hopes. He expected to find Walter and bring him home, and thus gain our favor for—something else."
"Well," said Sir Edward with his frown, "it is aston-

ishing to me how he's done it. It looks like collusion. I

suppose it's only a piece of luck, a great piece of luck."

"He has not done it at all," said Lady Penton, "Wat has not so much as seen him. He has had nothing to do

with it at all."

The cloud rolled off Sir Edward's brow: he gave expression to the delightful relief of his mind in a low laugh.

"I thought," he said, "nothing would come of it, he was so cock-sure. I thought from the first nothing would come of it: but of course you were all a great deal wiser than I. So he came home of himself when he was tired? Let me see the boy." And the see the boy. " The see the boy of the see the see the boy of the see the see the boy of the see the boy of the see the see the boy of the see the see the boy of the see the se

NO LONGER COCK-SURE.

ROCHFORD came back in a sadly humbled condition of mind. He was indeed summoned back by a telegram which told him that all was well and his services unnecessary, and returned trailing his arms, so to speak, very much cast down, beginning to say to himself that the Reading solicitor was not at all likely to be considered a fit match for Sir Edward Penton's daughter now that all chance of special service to the family was over. Young idiot! why, after staying away so long, couldn't he have stayed a little longer? Why not have helped somebody by his folly instead of simply dropping from the skies when it suited him in his egotism and selfishness? Rochford came back deeply humiliated, deeply despondent. He too had tramped about London one weary and dismal day, and with

disgust had recognized that his mission was not so easy as he had supposed. He had gone to the post-office which Walter had given as his address, and had made what inquiries were possible, and then had hung about hoping that Walter would come to fetch his letter, like those sportsmen who hang about the pools where their big game go to drink. But no one came; and in the morning had arrived that telegram-"All well; further search unnecessary. Has returned home." Confound him! Why, after making everybody miserable, could he not have stayed another day? Rochford came home very despondent, taking the blackest view of affairs. If he had but acted with more prudence in the end of the year-if he had but pushed on matters and got that bargain accomplished before Sir Walter had been stricken with his last illness!-then the Pentons, though they would still have had the baronetcy, would not have been a great county family, and Ally, without fortune to speak of, would have made no mésalliance in marrying a man who could keep her in luxury though he was but the family man of business. But now, though the fortune was scarcely greater, the position was very different. The mother was very artless, but still she knew enough to know that girls so attractive, with the background of Penton behind them, even if they had not a penny, were not to be thrown away on men like himself. Such was the tenor of his thoughts as he came back. He had expected to return with trumpets sounding and colors flying, bringing back in triumph the wanderer, and having a certain right to his recompense. He came now silent and shamed, an officious person who had offered more than he could perform, who had thrust his services upon those who did not require them. He had not even the courage to see Ally before he went in humbled to her father. It was his duty to tell Sir Edward all that had happened, but he had scarcely a doubt as to what must follow. He would be sent away, he felt sure; probably he would not be allowed to speak to her at all—he the man of business, and she the princess royal, the eldest daughter of the house.

But, to his relief as well as surprise, Sir Edward met him with an unclouded countenance. He gave him a warm grasp of the hand. He said, "Well, Rochford, all's well that ends well. You see it was all settled more easily than

you supposed."

"You can't doubt, Sir Edward, that I am most glad it should be so."

"Oh, yes, I'm sure you are; glad—but a little disappointed, eh?—it's quite natural: you were so cock-sure. That is the worst of you young men. You think we elder ones are all ninnies; you think we don't know what we are about. And you are so certain that you sometimes take us in, and we think so too. But you see you are wrong now and then," said Sir Edward, with high satisfaction, "and it turns out that it is we who are in the right."

Rochford did not fail to remark to himself in passing, that though he might be wrong he saw very little reason for the assertion that Sir Edward was right. But he was too much cast down for argument. He said, "The chief thing is that your anxiety is relieved. I am very glad of that—though I should have liked better to have had a hand in doing it." And then he drew himself together as best he could. "There is another subject, Sir Edward, that I wished to speak to you about."

"Yes, very likely; but you must hear first about Walter. So far as I can make out it has been a mere escapade, and he has been mercifully saved from committing himself, from-compromising his future. We can't be thankful enough for that. He comes back free as he went away, and having learned a lesson, I hope, an important lesson. We mean to say nothing about it, Rochford. You'll not take any notice: I'm sure we can trust

"I hope so," said the young man; and then he repeated, "Sir Edward, there is another subject—"

"You don't look," said Sir Edward, rubbing his hands

with internal satisfaction, "so cock-sure about that."

This was not very discouraging if he had retained sufficient presence of mind to see it. But he was out of heart as well as out of confidence, and everything seemed to him to be of evil augury. "No, indeed," he said, "I am far from being sure. I feel that what I am going to ask will seem to you very presumptuous: and if it were not that my whole heart is in it and all my hopes-"

"Ah, you use such words lightly, you young men—"
"I don't use them lightly. If I could help it I would
put off speaking to you. I would try whether it were not

possible to find some way of recommending myself-of

making you think a little better of me."

"If you suppose," cried Sir Edward, benignly, "that I think less of you because you were not successful about Walter you are quite mistaken, Rochford. You had not time to do anything. He left town almost as soon as you arrived in it. I never expect impossibilities, even when they are promised," he added, with a nod of his head.

"It is I that am looking for impossibilities, Sir Edward. I can't think how I could have been so bold. I have been letting myself think that perhaps—that if you could be got

to take it into consideration—that, that in short—"

And Mr. Rochford, crimsoning, growing pale, changing from one foot to another, looking all embarrassment and awkwardness, came to a dead stop and could find nothing more to say.

"What is it? You seem to have great difficulty in getting it out. What have I in my power that is so important, and that you are so shy about?"

"I am shy, that is just the word. You will think me-I don't know what you will think me-"

"Get it out, man. I can't tell till I know."

"Sir Edward," said Rochford, more and more embarrassed, "your daughter-"

"Oh, my daughter! Is that how it is?" It is not to be supposed that a day had elapsed after Walter's return and the relief of mind that followed it without some communication passing between Lady Penton and her husband on the second of the subjects that had excited her so deeply.

"Sir Edward," said the young man, "Miss Penton's family and position are of course superior to mine. It all depends on the way these matters are looked upon. Some people would consider this an insuperable obstacle. Some do not attach much importance to it. Ideas have changed so much on this subject. My grandfather, as perhaps you are aware, married a Miss Davenport of Doncaster. But I don't know how you may look on that sort of thing."

"I don't exactly see the connection," said Sir Edward;

"your grandfather's marriage was a good while ago."

"Yes, when prejudices were a great deal stronger than now. Though they exist in some places, I have the strongest reason to believe that among the best people they are no

longer held as they used to be. Eva Milton married a Manchester man that had no education to speak of at all."

"Are you arguing the question on abstract principles?" said Sir Edward, who was nursing his foot, and looking half-amused, half-bored. His companion was too anxious to be able to judge what this look meant, and he was sadly afraid of irritating the authority in whose hands his happi-

ness lay.

"Oh, no, not at all," he cried, anxiously; "I wanted to remind you, sir, that it was not the first time that such things had been done. It's no abstract question: all that I look forward to in life depends on it. I am not badly off, as I can prove to you if you will let me. I could keep my wife, if I had the good fortune to—to—make sure of that—surrounded by everything that belongs to her sphere. There should be nothing wanting in that way. I could make settlements that would be, I think, satisfactory."

"Is that how you talked to Ally?" said Sir Edward, a perception of the humor of the situation breaking in. "How astonished she must have been!" His mind was so unusually at ease that he was ready to smile even in the

midst of an important arrangement like this.

"To Ally!" cried Rochford, startled by the reference, and in his confusion unable to see how much it was in his favor. "No, sir," he said, eagerly, "not a word! Do you think I would fret her delicate mind with any such suggestions? No. She is far above all that. She knows nothing about it. I may not be worthy of her, but at least I know how to appreciate her. She has heard nothing like this from me."

"But I suppose you must think that what you did say was not without effect, and that the appreciation is not all on your side? You don't mind fretting my delicate mind, it appears," said Sir Edward; and then, in a sharper tone,

"How far has this matter gone?"

"Sir Edward," stammered the young man: his anxiety stupefied instead of quickening his senses; he seemed able perceive nothing that was not against him, "I—I—"

"You don't give me very much information," repeated the father. "Can't you tell me how far this matter has gone?"

Rochford was a keen man of business. He was not to be

overpowered by the most powerful judge or the most aggravating jury. He was in the habit of stating very clearly what he wanted to say. But now he stood before this tribunal stammering, without a word to say for himself. "Sir Edward," he repeated, "if I had taken time to think I should have felt that you ought to have been consulted first. But in an unguarded moment—my—my feelings got the better of me. I saw her unexpectedly alone. And then," he added with melancholy energy, "I thought, I confess, that if I could be of use, if I could find and bring

"I see," said Sir Edward, "that was why you undertook so much. It was scarcely very straightforward, was it, to profess all that interest in the brother when it was the sister

you were thinking of all the time?"

"Perhaps it might not be straightforward," owned the unsuccessful one; "and yet," after a pause, "it was no pretense. I was interested, if you will let me say so, in—all the family, Sir Edward. I should have been too glad to be of any use: even if there had been no—even if there had not existed—even if—"

"I see," said the stern judge again: and then there was a dreadful pause. Circumstances alter much, but not even the advanced views of the nineteenth century can alter the position in which a young lover stands before the father of the girl he loves—a functionary perhaps a little discredited by the march of modern ideas, but who nevertheless has still an enormous power in his hands, a power which the feminine heart continues to believe in, which is certainly able to cause a great deal of discomfort and inconvenience, if nothing else. Rochford stood thoroughly cowed, with his eyes cast down, before this great arbiter of fate, although after a while, as the silence continued, there began to crop up in his mind suggestions, resolutions: how nothing should make him resign his hopes; how only Ally herself could loose the bond between them, how he would take courage to say to the father that however much they respected him his decision would not be absolute, that on the contrary it could be resisted, that the two whose happiness was involved—that the two—the two—words which made his heart jump with a sudden throb in the midst of this horrible uncertainty-would stand against the world together not to be sundered. All these heroic thoughts

gathered in his mind as he stood awaiting the tremendous parental decision, which came in a form so utterly unex-pected, so bewildering, that he could only gasp, and for a moment could not reply. This was what Sir Edward said: "You know, I suppose, that my girls will have no money,

Rochford?"

"Sir!" cried the lover, with a burst of pent-up breath which seemed to carry away with it the burden of a whole lifetime of care from his soul.

"They will have no money. I am a poor man, and have always been so all my life. If you have not known that before you will have to know it now in your capacity (as you say) of the Penton man of business. To keep up Penton will tax every resource. We shall be rather poorer, my wife thinks, than we have been at the Hook; and as for the girls-"

"You don't make any—other objection? What do you think I'm made of? Idon't want any money, Sir Edward.
Money! when there is Miss Penton---Ally, if I may call her
so. How shall I ever thank you enough? I have plenty
of money; it's not money I want, it's—it's—"

Words failed him: he stood and swung Sir Edward's hand, who looked not without a glow of pleasurable feeling at this young fellow who beamed with gratitude and delight. It is never unpleasant to confer so great a favor. This had not been generally the position in which fate had placed Edward Penton. It had been usually the other way. He had received few blessings, even from the beggars, having so little to give; but an emperor could not have conferred a greater gift than his daughter, a spotless little princess of romance, a creature altogether good and fair and sweet. He felt the water come into his eyes out of that simple sense of munificence and liberal generosity. "I think," he said, "you're a good fellow, Rochford, and that you'll be good to little Ally. She's too young for anything of the kind, but her mother sees no objection. And she ought to know best."

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE FATE OF THE CHIFFONIER.

THE family of Penton Hook took possession of the great house of Penton in the spring. It need scarcely be said that there were endless consultations, discussions, committees of ways and means of every imaginable kind before this great removal was accomplished. Lady Penton's first visit to her new home was one which was full of solemnity. It was paid in much state, a visit of ceremony, greatly against the wish of both of the visitors and the visited, before the Russell Pentons withdrew from the great house.

"We must go to bid them good-bye," Sir Edward said.

"We must not fail in any civility."

"Do you call that civility? She will hate the sight of us. I should myself in her place," Lady Penton cried.

But he had his way, as was to be expected. They drove to Penton in the new carriage, which Lady Penton could not enjoy for thinking how much it cost, behind that worthy and excellent pair of brown horses, more noted for their profound respectability and virtue than for appearance or speed, which Sir Edward had consented to buy with some mortification, but which his wife approved as a pair, without much knowledge of the points in which they were defective. He knew that Russell Penton set them down as a pair of screws at the first glance; but Lady Penton, who had never possessed a pair of horses before, was quite impervious to this, and appreciated the grandeur, though never without a pang at the cost. But the sight of the great drawingroom overwhelmed the visitor. The first coup d'æil of the beautiful, vast room, with its row of pillars, its vast stretches of carpets, its costly furniture, so stupefied her that the sight of Mrs. Russell Penton herself in her deep mourning, and that look of injured majesty of which she could not, with all her efforts, divest herself, failed to produce the effect which otherwise it must have had. Lady Penton had fully intended to take no notice, to banish if possible from her face all appearance of curiosity or of the natural investigation which a first visit to the house which was to be her own would naturally give rise to; but she

could not quite conceal the startled dismay of her first glance—a sentiment which was more agreeable to the previous mistress of the house than any other would have been. It was not very amiable, perhaps, on the part of Mrs. Russell Penton, to be pleased that her successor should thus be overwhelmed by the weight of the inheritance—but perhaps it was natural enough.

It was not possible that the conversation should be otherwise than restrained and difficult. Russell Penton, as usual, threw himself into the breach. He entered into a

lively description of their plans of travel.

"We both of us love the sunshine," he said; "England is the noblest of countries, but she is far away from the center of warmth and light. There is no saying how far we may go southward before we come back."

"But you were always fond of home, Alicia," said (this being, of course, as all his companions remarked, the very last thing that ought to have occurred to him to say) the

new proprietor of Penton.

"Home, I suspect," she said, in her formal way, "is more where one chooses to make it than I have hitherto

thought." And then there was a pause.

"The weather will be quite delightful by this time in Italy, I suppose," said Lady Penton, timidly. "I have never traveled at all; we have never had it in our power; but it seems as if it should always be fine there."

"It is not, though. There is no invariable good weather," said Russell Penton. "It generally turns out to be exceptional, and just as bad as what you have left,

wherever you go."

He had forgotten his little flourish of trumpets about the sunshine; and again they all sat silent, gazing at each other for a few terrible moments, asking each other on each side,

Why did they come? and, Why did we come?

"The river has kept in tolerable bounds this year," said Russell Penton, catching at a new subject; "no doubt because we have had less rain than usual. Come to the window, and let me show you the view." He led Lady Penton to the further end of the room, where a side window commanded the whole range of the river, with the red roofs of Penton Hook making a spot of warm color low down by the side of the stream. "I am glad you see it

before anything is disturbed," he said; "an empty house is

always a sight of dismay. "water the middle a

"Oh, I wish it were never to be disturbed at all!" cried the poor lady; "I feel a dreadful impostor—an usurper—as if we were taking it from its rightful owner. It is all so suitable to her, and she to it," she continued, casting an alarmed, admiring look to where the mistress of the house sat, an imposing figure, all crape and jet, like a queen

about to abdicate, but not with her will.

"Yes, for she has made it all," said the Prince Consort of the place; "but so will it be suitable to you when you have re-made it, Lady Penton; and if it is any consolation to you to know, I shall be a much happier man out of this house. After awhile I believe everything will be brighter for us both. But don't let us talk of that. We have all had enough of the subject. Tell me what you are going to do about Mab, who has fallen so deeply in love with you all."

"She is a dear little girl," said Lady Penton.

asked her to come and pay us a long visit."

"That is very kind; but pray remember that it would be still kinder to her to let her be with you as she wishes. She has more money than a little girl ought to have. It

will be good and kind in every way."

Lady Penton shook her head as he went on talking. Some people are proud in one way and some in another. She did not think much of Mab's money. She was ready to open her heart to the orphan girl, but not to profit by her. They stood in the window with the great landscape before them, and the great room behind, which was too splendid even for that chiffonier; and involuntarily Lady Penton's mind went back to that overwhelming question of the furniture, which was so much more important than little Mab and her fortune. To think of bringing anything from the Hook here! The chairs and tables would be lost even if they were not so shabby. Nothing would bear transplanting but the children, "And you can't furnish a house with children," she said, ruefully, to herself. "Your wife no doubt will alter everything," said Mrs.

Russell Penton, following the other pair with her eyes.

"How could you think so, Alicia? It shall be altered as little as possible. Everything that belongs to the past is as dear to me as to you."

"I said your wife," said Alicia. And then she added, "No doubt she would like to go over the house."

"She wishes nothing, I am sure, that would vex you,"

Sir Edward said.

"Vex! I hope I have not so little self-command. The place has become indifferent indeed to me. It was dear by association, but now that's all ended. One ends where another begins. I can only hope, Edward, that your branch of the family will be more fortunate-more-than ours have been."

"Thank you, Alicia. I hope that you may be very happy, Russell and you. He's as good a fellow as lives; and I'm sure, a delightful companion to be alone with."

"Are you recommending my husband to me?" she said, with one of those smiles which made her cousin, whose utterances certainly were very inappropriate, shrink into himself. "Don't you think I ought to know better than any one what a delightful companion he is? And I hear you are to have a marriage in your family. Harry Rochford will, I hope, prove a delightful companion too."

"He is a good fellow," said poor Sir Edward, able to think of no more original phrase. "He is not quite in the position a Penton might have looked for—"

"Oh," she cried, hastily, "what does that matter?— there are Pentons and Pentons. And your daughter, Edward—your daughter--"

"I am sorry you don't think well of my daughter,

Alicia."

"I never said so. She is very pretty and what people call sweet. I know no more of her; how could I? I was going to say she looked unambitious. And against Harry Rochford there is not a word to be said. Don't you think

your wife would like to see over the house?"

This is how they parted, without any warm rapprochement, though Alicia, with her usual consciousness of her own faults and her husband's opinion, involuntarily condemned every word she herself said, and everything she did, while she almost forced Lady Penton from one room to another, each of which filled that poor lady with deeper and deeper dismay. But, notwithstanding this secret current of self-disapproval, and notwithstanding the certainty she had of what her husband felt on the subject, there was a certain stern pleasure in bidding her supplanters good-bye

on the threshold of the house that was still her own; dismissing them, so to speak, for the last time from Penton with a keen sense of the despondency and discouragement with which they went away. She took notice of everything as she did them that unusual honor, which was an aggravation under the circumstances, of accompanying them to the door; of the pair of screws-of the absence of any footman -and, still more, of the depressed looks of the simple pair. All these things gave her a thrill of satisfaction. Who were they, to be the possessors of Penton? They did not even appreciate it-did not admire it-thought of the expense! But she went upstairs again with her husband following her, feeling more like a culprit, a school-boy who is expecting a lecture, than it was consistent with Alicia's dignity to feel. Russell did not say anything, but he showed inclinations to whistle, as it were, under his breath.

"I am very glad this is over," she said.
"So am I," he replied.

"I know what you think, Gerald-that I ought to be more sympathetic. In what way could I be sympathetic? She is buried in calculations as to how they are to live here; and he-"

"I respect her calculations," said Russell Penton. "It is a dreadful white elephant to come into the poor lady's

"And yet you scarcely concealed your pleasure when it passed away from me—to whom it has always been a home so dear."

"I never stand on my consistency, Alicia. I am glad and sorry about the same thing, you see. I am sorry that you are sorry to go away, yet I can't help being glad that you are freed from the bondage of this place, which has been a kind of idol to you all; and I am glad they have it, yet sorry for poor Lady Penton and her troubled looks. When we go away from Penton I shall feel as if we were starting for our honey-moon."

"Don't say so, Gerald-when you think how it is that

this has come about."

"It has come about by a great grief, my darling, yet a natural one—one that could not have been long averted. And I hope you don't object, Alicia, now that you have fulfilled your duty to the last detail, that your husband

should be glad to have you more his own than Penton

would ever have permitted you to be."

She accepted the kiss he gave her, not without a sense of the sweetness of being loved, but yet with a consciousness that when he spoke of her fulfilling her duty to the last detail he implied a certain satisfaction in having got rid of that duty at last. She knew as well as he did, with a faint pleasure mingling with many a thought of pain and some of irritation, that this setting out together was indeed at last their real honey-moon, in so far as that consists of a life together and alone.

Lady Penton returned very grave and overwhelmed with thought to the shelter of those red roofs at the Hook which made so picturesque a point in the landscape from Penton. She did not make any response to the children who rushed out in a body to see the parents come home, to admire the pair of serews, and the new carriage. She went into the drawing-room and gazed long upon the chiffonier, measuring and gauging it with her eye from every side. It had, as has been said, a plate-glass back, and it was inlaid, and had various brass ornaments entitling it to the name of ormolu. She touched its corners with her hand lovingly, then shook her head. "Not even the chiffonier will do for Penton," she said; "not even the chiffonier!" Nothing else could have given the family such an idea of the grandeur of the great house, and their own grandeur to whom it belonged, as well as of the saddening yet exhilarating fact that everything would have to be got new.

"Well, my dear," said Sir Edward, "we must make up our minds to that, for to tell the truth, though you were always so pleased with that piece of furniture, I never liked

it much."

He never liked it much! Lady Penton turned a reproachful glance upon her husband; it was as if he had

abandoned a friend in trouble.

"Edward," she said, with a tone of despair, "if this will not do, nothing will do-nothing we have. I had given up the carpets and curtains, but I still had a fond hope-I thought that one side of the room, at any rate, would be furnished with that; but it would be nothing in the Penton drawing-room-nothing! And if that won't do, nothing will do."

"My dear," Sir Edward said—he planted himself very

firmly on his feet, with the air of Fitzjames, in the poem, setting his back against the rock—"my dear," he repeated, looking round as who should say,

> "Come one, come all, this rock shall fly From its firm base as soon as I:"

"I have thought of all that; and I have something to propose. You must not take me up in a hurry, but hear me out. We are all very fond of Penton Hook; but we can't live in two houses at once."

"Especially when they are so close to each other," cried Anne, instinctively standing up by him. "I know what

father means."

She was the only one whose mind was disengaged and free to follow every new initiative. Ally was altogether occupied by her new prospects, and Walter, though he did his best to resume his old aspect, was still too much absorbed in those that were past. Anne alone was the cheerful present, the to-day of the family, ready to take up every suggestion. She stood up by her father womanfully and put her arm through his. "I am with you, father—though I'm not of much account," she said.

Lady Penton withdrew her regretful gaze from her

chiffonier. She did not, to tell the truth, expect any practical light about the furniture from her husband, who was only a theorist in such matters, or the enthusiast by his side; but she was a woman of impartial mind, and she would not refuse to listen. She turned her mild eyes upon

the pair.

"Well, then," said Sir Edward, "this is what I am going to propose: that I should let the Hook as it stands—poor old house, it is shabby enough, but in summer it will always bring a fair rent. Take away nothing; the chiffonier shall stand in all its glory, and you can come the back at it my dear from time to time. And back and look at it, my dear, from time to time. And look here, it is no use straining at a gnat; we must make up our minds to it. As soon as my cousin goes we must write to Gillow or somebody—who is the best man?—to go in at once to Penton and furnish it from top to bottom. It is no use straining at a gnat, as I say. We must just make a great gulp and get it down."

"Straining at a—do you call that a gnat, Edward? It is a camel you mean."

"Camel or not, my dear," said Sir Edward, with a look of determination; "that is how it must be."

They all held their breath at this tremendous resolution. "But as for Gillow, that is nonsense. It must be Maple at the very utmost," Lady Penton said.

CHAPTER XLVII.

AN AGITATING ENCOUNTER.

It was spring before these changes were accomplished and the family got into Penton, all newly furnished from top to bottom as Sir Edward in his magnificence had said. Perhaps this was not exactly true, for Lady Penton kept an unwearying eye upon all the movements of the workmen, and decided that it was unnecessary to touch many of the rooms where there was still enough of furniture to make them habitable, or which only the exigencies of a very large party of visitors would make necessary—and that was not a contingency likely to occur. They took up their residence in Penton when the woods were all carpeted with primroses, and everything was opening to the new life and hope of the growing season. No doubt it was evident at once that the grandeur of the old Pentons, their cold but splendid dignity of living, and all the self-restrained yet selfconscious wealth of their manners and ways, the costliness, the luxury, the state, were not to be reproduced; but then the house had become a cheerful house, which it never was under Mrs. Russell Penton's sway. It was no longer silent with one stately figure moving here and there, and Russell Penton, fretted and impatient, protesting in his morning coat with his hands in his pockets against the splendor. There was no splendor now, but a perpetual movement, a flitting of many groups about the lawns, a sound of cheerful voices.

The children enjoyed it with their whole hearts, and Mab Russell, who had come upon that promised long visit, and had managed to establish herself with the maid and the man who were attached to her little person, and other accessories, which looked like a very long visit, indeed—plunged into the midst of all their diversions, and became the ringleader in all nursery mischief. "I never had any growing up," she said. "I have always been out and seeLady Penton. Let me go back to the nursery; and then I can be promoted to the school-room, and then burst upon the world. After Ally and Anne are both married I shall be of such use. You can't do without a grown-up daughter. But I am only in the nursery now." "Anne is not thinking of marrying, my dear. She is too young," Lady Penton would say, which was all the gentle protest she made against Mab's claim. For she was very pitiful of the poor little orphan—and then Walter— Perhaps it is not possible to be a mother without admitting certain schemes into one's head. And Sir Edward, for his part, did not oppose, which was more curious. He was not fond of strangers, and as he; like his wife, was too proud to hear of Mab's allowance, and her horses and she were a great expense to the restrained and economical household, it may perhaps be supposed that the father, though no schemer,

had fancies in his mind, too.

The one in the house whose heart beat low, whose life seemed to have sunk into the shadow, was the one of all others who should have been the brightest, and whose beginning of existence included most capabilities of enjoyment. Walter was now the heir of Penton in reality. He had attained everything he had once looked forward to. More than this, he had that little fortune of his own which in a few months would be in his actual and unfettered possession. But his life, before ever it opened out, had been chilled. It seemed to him at first that life and all its joys were over for him. It was not only that he had been disappointed in his love, but it had been associated to him with all the disgusts that affect youth so profoundly; he had touched the mercenary, the meretricious, the degraded, and his pride had been humbled by the contact. Yet he had been ready to endure that contact, to submit to be linked with these horrors for the sake of his love. He had known even in the midst of his rapture of youthful fantastic passion, that to be linked with all these debasing circumstances would take the fragrance and the beauty out of To have Mrs. Sam Crockford for his mother-in-law, to recognize that uncleanly, untidy, sordid little house as Emmy's home would have been misery even in the midst of bliss; he had been aware of this even in the hottest of his pursuit, while he was possessed by the image of Emmy,

and could think of no possibility of happiness save that of marrying her. Had it been Crockford's cottage in all its old-fashioned humility; had it been the kind, deaf, dear old woman who had been familiar to him all his life, how different! But the dreadful woman in that dreadful parlor, with her smile, and her portraits all smiling just the same upon the dingy walls, with her white, horrible, unwholesome hands, even in Emmy's presence how he had shuddered at her! These images oppressed the poor boy's imagination like a nightmare-he could not forget them; and he could not forget her who had made him accept and tolerate all that, who still could, if she would but hold up a finger, make everything possible. How was it that this magic existed? What was the meaning of it? He knew now with more or less certainty what Emmy was. She was not, notwithstanding the cleverness of speech which had so filled him with wonder at first, either educated or refined; and she was not beautiful. He was able to perceive even that. He saw, too, and hated himself for seeing, indications of her mother's face in Emmy's, the beginning of that horrible smile. And he knew also that she had no response to make to the enthusiastic love in his own youthful breast, the passion of devotion and self-abandonment which had swept in his mind all precaution and common sense away. No such operations had taken place in her. She had weighed him in the balance of the most common, the most prosaic form of sense, that of worldly advantage-of money. His heart was sore with all these wounds, he felt them in every fiber. It had been taken into consideration whether he was rich enough, whether he had enough to offer. She whom he loved with extravagant youthful devotion, ready to sacrifice everything for her, even his tastes, the manners and ways of thinking in which he had been brought up, had tried him by the vulgarest of tests. How could a young heart bear all this? Seldom, very seldom, does so complete a disenchantment come to one so young; for Walter did not take it as young Pendennis did, or learn to laugh at his own delusion. He had no temptation to laugh; he could not put out of his pained young being the thought that it could not be true, that after all there must be some mistake in it, that his love must have judged rightly, that his disenchantment was but some horrible work of the devil. And wounded, undeceived, quivering

with pain as he was, his heart still yearned after her; he formed to himself pictures of what he might find if he stole back unawares, without any warning. He imagined her sitting in dreariness and solitude, perhaps shut up by the mother lest she should call him back, a patient martyr, knowing how she had been vilified in his eyes—but not vilified, oh, no, only mistaken. He fed his heart with dreams of this kind even while he knew—knew by experience, by certainty, by her own words, and looks, and sentiments, noways disguised, that the fact was not so. Women more often go on loving after the beloved has lost all illusion than men do, but perhaps in extreme youth the boy has this experience oftener than the girl. Poor Walter had been stabbed in every sensitive part, and felt his wounds all

keen; but still he could not put her out of his heart.

And the consequence of this morbid and divided soul was that his being altogether was weakened and the life made languid in it. He had no heart, as people say, for anything. He left the Hook without regret, and entered on the larger life of Penton without pleasure; everything was obscured to him as if a veil were over it. "No joy the blowing season gives," his vitality had sunk altogether. It was arranged that he was to go to Oxford in April, but he felt neither pleasure nor unwillingness. It was all unreal to him; nothing was real but that little episode. Emmy in her brightness and lightness by his side in the streets, making those little expeditions with him in all the confidence and closeness of belonging to him, two betrothed that were like one; and the mother in the background with her hands, which he still seemed to feel and shudder at. He had almost daily impulses to go and see all these scenes again, to see the actors in them, to make out if they were false or true. But he did not do so, perhaps because of the languor of his being, perhaps because he was afraid of any one divining what he wanted, perhaps because he clung to some ray of illusion still.

There began, however, to be frequent visits to town, Lady Penton being absorbed in that important matter of Ally's trousseau, which could no longer be deferred. What changes seemed to have happened in their life since the time when they all went up to London, a simple party, to provide what was necessary for the visit to Penton! Penton, it had seemed at that time, would never be theirs; they

were giving it up and contemplating a comfortable obscurity with a larger income and no responsibilities. Now they had indeed the larger income, but so many responsibilities with it, and so much to be done, that the poverty of Penton Hook seemed almost wealth in comparison; yet—for the mind accustoms itself very quickly to what is, however much it may have struggled for a different way—there was perhaps no one of the family who could now have returned to the Hook without the most humiliating sense of downfall, a feeling which Lady Penton herself shared, in spite of herself. The trousseau occupied a great many of the thoughts of the ladies at this period. They had a great many shops to go to, and when by times one of the male members of the family accompanied them, it was tedious work inspecting their proceedings and waiting, looking on, while so many stuffs were turned over and pat-

terns compared.

It happened one of these days that Walter was of the party. How he had been got to join it nobody knew, for he shrunk from London and could scarcely be induced to enter it at all, his inclinations, and yet not his inclinations so much as his dreams, and that uneasy sense that his disillusionment might of itself be an illusion, drew him in one direction, while all the impulses of the moment were toward the other way. But this day he had come he could not tell why. Mab was one of the party, and though it can not be said that Mab's presence was an attraction, yet there was a certain camaraderie between the two, and she had taken it upon herself to talk to him, to attempt to amuse and interest him, when nobody knew how to approach him in his forlorn languor so unlike himself. Even Ally and Anne, his sisters, were so moved by sympathy for Wat, and by dismayed wondering what he was thinking of and what they could say, what depths of his recently acquired experience he was straying in, and what they could do to call him back from those depths—that they were silenced even by their feeling for him. But Mab had no such restraint upon her, though she knew more than they did, having seen him at the very crisis of his fate; and though she thought she knew a great deal more than she really knew, Mab had no such awed and trembling respect for Walter's experiences as the others had, and would break in upon him frankly and talk until he threw off his dreams,

or persuade him into a walk in the woods, or to join them in something which made him for the moment forget himself. His idea was that she knew nothing of that one unrevealed chapter in his history which the others, he thought, could not forget; so that Mab and Walter were very good Even now, when Ally and her mother were busy over their silks and muslins, Mab left that interesting discussion by times to talk to Walter, who lounged about distrait, as creatures of his kind will, in a shop adapted for the wants of the other half of humanity. Walter stood about waiting, taking little notice of anything except when he turned at her call to respond to what Mab said to him, and that was only by intervals. It was in one of these pauses that his eye was caught by a group at a little distance, which at first had no more interest for him than any other of the groups about. It was in one of the subdivisions of the great shop, framed in on two sides by stands upon which hung all kinds of cloaks and mantles. In the vacant space in the middle were two or three ladies, attended upon by one of the young women of the shop, who was trying on for their gratification one mantle after another, while the customers looked on to judge of the effect. These figures moved before Walter's dreamy eyes vaguely without attracting his attention, until suddenly something in the attitude of one of them struck upon his awakening sense. She was standing before a tall glass, which reflected her figure, with the silken garment which she was trying on drawn about her with a little shrug and twist of her shoulders to get it into its place. Wat's heart began to beat, the mist fled from his eyes. The group grew distinct in a moment, separated as it was from all the others by the little fence half round, the light coming down from above upon the slim, elastic figure with all its graceful curves, standing so lightly as if but newly poised on earth, turning round with the air he knew so well. He had a moment of eblouissement, of bewilderment, and then it all became clear and plain. He made but the very slightest movement, uttered not a word; the shock of the discovery, the thrill of her presence so near him, were too penetrating to be betrayed by outward signs. He stood like one stupefied, though all his faculties on the moment had become so keen and clear. There was no possibility of any doubt; her light hair, all curled on her forehead, her face so full of brightness and

animation, gleamed out upon him as she turned round.

Emmy here, before his eyes!

It was like watching a little drama to see her amid the more severely clothed, cloaked, and bonneted figures of the ladies round. Her head was uncovered. She was in what seemed her natural place. Her patience seemed boundless. She took down cloak after cloak and slid them about her graceful shoulders, and made a few paces up and down to show them. It was a pretty occupation enough. She was dressed well; her natural grace made what she was doing appear no vulgar service, but an action full of courtesy and patience. The unfortunate boy watched her with eyes which enlarged and expanded with gazing. This, then, was what she had been doing while he had waited for her, while he had been her faithful attendant. She had never betrayed it to him. Sometimes he had believed that she was a teacher, sometimes that she went to work somewhere, he did not know how. This was what her occupation had been all the time. To make a trade out of her pretty gracefulness, her slim, youthful, easy figure, her perception of what was comely, while he was there who would have taken her out of all that, who would so fain have given her all he had. Why had she not come to him? He watched the pretty head turn, and that twist of the shoulders settling the new wrap. They were all beautiful on her. Did the women who were round her believecould they believe that they could resemble Emmy-that anything could ever make them like her?

Walter's whole aspect changed, he stood as if on tiptoe watching that little scene. At last the bargain was decided, the purchase made; the figures changed places, went and came from one side to another, as in the theater, then dissolved away, leaving her there before the big glass, in a little pose of her own, contemplating herself. It was in this glass that by and by Emmy, looking at herself, with her head now on one side, now on the other, suddenly perceived a stranger approaching, a gentleman, not with the air of a customer, coming along hurriedly with his face turned toward her. Emmy was sufficiently used to be admired. She knew as well as any one that her pretty figure, as she put on the cloaks that hung about, was a pretty sight to see, that the graceful little tricks with which she arranged them on her shoulders gave piquancy to her own

appearance, and a grace which perhaps did not belong to it to the article of apparel which she put on. She knew this, and so did her employers, who engaged her for this grace, and profited by her prettiness and her skill. But Emmy was very well aware that with strange gentlemen in this sanctuary of the feminine she had nothing to do. She made her preparations for retiring discreetly before the approaching man. But before she did so she gave him a glance over her shoulder, a glance of invincible inherent coquetry, just to let him see that she perceived she was admired, and had no objection theoretically, though as a practical matter the thing was impossible. As she gave him this look through the medium of the big mirror, Emmy recognized Walter as he had recognized her. She gave a sudden low cry of alarm, and put up her hands to her face to hide herself, and then darted like a startled hare through the intricacies of all those subdivisions. Walter called out her name, and hurried after her, breathless, forgetting everything, but in a moment found himself hopelessly astray amid screens which balked his passage and groups of ladies who stared at him as if he had been a madman. Those screens, with their hanging finery, those astonished groups disturbed in their occupation, seemed to swallow up all trace of the little light figure which had disappeared in a moment. He stumbled on as far as he could till he was met by a severe and stately personage who blocked the way.

"Is there anything I can show you, sir?" this stately lady said, who was as imperious as if she had been a duchess.

"I-I saw some one I knew," said Walter; "if I might

but speak to her for a moment."

"Do you mean one of our young ladies, sir?" said that princess dowager. "The young ladies in the mantle department are under my care; we shall be happy to show you anything in the way of business, but private friends are not for business hours; and this is a place for ladies, not for young gentlemen," the distinguished duenna said.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE END OF ALL.

What was he to do? He was stopped short, bewildered, excited, quivering with a hundred sensations, by this im-

passable guardian of virtue and proprieties. A young gentleman is in every personal particular stronger, more effective and potent than a middle-aged woman in a shop; yet a bolder man than Walter would have been subdued by a representative of law and order so uncompromising. He looked at her appealingly, with his young eyes full of anxiety and trouble.

"I wanted only—a moment—to say a word—" he faltered, as if his fate hung upon her grace. But nothing could move her. She stood before him with her black silk skirts filling up the passage, in all the correctness of cos-

tume and demeanor which her position required.

"Young gentleman," she said, "remember that you may be doing a great deal of harm by insisting. You can't speak to any one here. If you'll take my advice you'll join the ladies that seem to be looking for you. That's your party, I believe, sir," she said, with a majestic wave of her hand. And then poor Walter heard Ally's voice behind him.

"Oh, Wat, what are you doing? We thought we had lost you, and mother is waiting. Oh, Wat, what were you doing there? Who were you talking to? What could you want among all the mantles?" Another voice came to the rescue while he turned round bewildered. "I know what he was doing, Ally; he was looking for that wrap you were talking of. You should have asked me to come and help you to choose it, Mr. Penton." They swept him away bewildered, their voices and soft rustle of movement coming round him like the soft compulsion of a running stream. The girls flowed forth in pleasant words as they got him between them, as irresistible as the duenna, though in a different way, Ally thanking him for the intention that Mab had attributed to him. "Oh, Wat, how good of you to think of that!"

"But, Mr. Penton, you should have asked me to come with you to choose it; I would have protected you," said the laughing Mab. He was swept away by them, confused, with something singing in his ears, with—not the earth, but at least the solid flooring, covered with noiseless carpets, laden with costly wares, giving way, as he felt, under

his stumbling feet.

He accompanied them home as in a dream: fortunately their minds were engrossed with subjects of their own, so

that they did not remark his silence, his preoccupation. He sat sunk in his corner of the railway carriage, his face half covered with his hand, thinking it all over, contemplating that scene, seeing those figures float before him, and her look in the mirror over her shoulder. Ah! that look in the mirror was a stab to him, keener than any blow. For it was not to him that Emmy threw that glance—it was to any man, to the first pair of admiring eyes that might find out her prettiness, her grace-oh, not to him! When she saw who it was she had covered her face and fled. She had been ashamed to be discovered. Why should she be ashamed to be discovered? There was nothing shameful in what she was doing. In the quiet of the great shop, among women, no disturbing influences near-among the pretty things that suited her, the atmosphere warm and soft, the carpets noiseless under her feet. Perhaps he said all this to himself to console him for some internal shock it gave him to see her there at everybody's will, turning herself into a lay figure that all the vulgar women, the dumpy matrons, the heavy girls, might be deceived and think that by assuming the same garment they might become as beautiful as she. Walter was not aware of this if it were so, but all his thoughts, which he had been trying to sever from her, went back with a bound. He thought and thought, as the lines of the country, all touched with reviving green, flew past the carriage windows, and the jar and croak of the railway made conversation difficult, and justified his retirement into himself—seeing her now in a new light, seeing her in perspective, the light all round her, her daily work, her home, the diversions she had loved. He said to himself that it was a life of duty, though not one that the vulgar mind recognized as drawn on elevated lines. How patient she had been, smiling upon those whom she had served, putting on one thing after another, exhibiting everything at its best to please them! It was all curiously mixed up with pain and sharpness, this rapture of admiration, and confusion, and longing, and regret, which the sight of her had worked in his mind. The smile on her lips was a little like the smile with which her mother had been represented as charming the public. Emmy had her public to charm, too. Oh, if he could but snatch her away from it all!—carry her off, hide her from all contact with the common world! It occurred to him quite irrelevantly in the midst of his thoughts, how it might be if Emmy at Penton, or in any other such place, should suddenly encounter some one whom she had served at Snell and Margrove's? This thought came into his mind like an arrow fired by an enemy across the tender and eager course of his anticipations and resolution. How could she bear it? and how should he bear it, to see the stare, the whisper, the wonder, the scorn in the looks of some pair of odious, envious, spiteful women (women always call forth these adjectives under such circumstances). This arrow went to his very heart, and wounded him in the midst of his longing and purpose, and hot, impatient aspiration. And then he seemed to see her with that pretty trick of movement settling the cloak upon her shoulders, to show it off to the intending purchaser! Oh, Emmy! his Emmy! that she should be exposed to that! And yet he said to himself it was nothing derogatory-oh, nothing derogatory!-a safe, sheltered, noiseless place, among women, among beautiful stuffs and things, with no jar of the outside world about! If he could but snatch her away from it, carry her away!

Penton contained his body but not his mind for some time after. What could he do? She had rejected himfor motives of prudence, poor Emmy! and returned to her shop. Why? why? Was he so distasteful to her as that? -that she should prefer her shop to him and his ten thousand pounds? And yet he had not felt himself to be distasteful. Even on this unexpected, undreamed-of meeting, she had hidden her face and fled, that he might not identify her, might not speak to her. Was she, then, so set against him? And yet she had not always been set against him. Walter did not know how long the time was which passe? like a dream, while he pondered these things, asking himself every morning what he should do? whether he should return and try his fortune again; whether when she knew all she would yield to his entreaties and allow him to deliver her from that servitude? It was on a Saturday at last that the impulse became suddenly uncontrollable. He had been thinking over her little holiday, the Saturdays, which she had to herself, the little time when she was free, when she had gone out with him enjoying the air, even though it was winter, and the freedom, though he had not known in what bondage her days were spent. He could not contain himself when he remembered this. He went hurriedly away,

not, as he had done on a previous occasion, in hot enthusiasm and rapture, but sadly, perceiving now all he was doing, and the break he must make, if he were successful, between himself and his home-perceiving too the difficulties that might come after, the habits that were not as his, the modes of life which are so hard to efface. Even his anticipation of happiness was all mixed with pain. It had become to him rather a vision of the happiness of delivering her, of placing her in circumstances more fit, surrounding her with everything delightful, than of the bliss to himself which would come from her companionship. Was he a little uncertain of that after all that had come and gone? But Walter would never have owned this to himself-only it was of her happiness, not of his, that he thought; and something wrung his heart as he left Penton behind, and took his way toward the house of Mrs. Sam Crockford with

a shuddering recollection which he could not subdue.

He had planned to get there about noon, when Emmy would be coming home. She might be tired, she might be sad, she might be cheered by the sudden appearance of a faithful lover, bringing the means of amusement and variety in his hand. They might go to Richmond, and he would take her on the river, as she had said she liked it, though in winter that had not been practicable. And he had made up his mind to insist, to be masterful, as it was said women liked a man to be. He would not accept a denial, he thought. He would tell her that he could not endure it, that this work of hers must come to an end. He made up his mind that neither her sauciness nor her sweetness should distract him from his resolution, that this thing must come te an end. He walked most of the long way from the railway station to the little street in which was the mean little house where she lived with her mother. How often he had trodden that way with his heart beating-how often distracted with pain! There was more pain than pleasure in his bosom now. He did not know how she would receive him, but he had made up his mind not to be discouraged by any reception she might give him. This time he would have his way. His motive was no longer selfish, he said to himself. It was no longer for him, but for her.

There was a little commotion in the street, of which he took no particular notice as he came up. A carriage with a pair of gray horses was coming along with the familiar 7-2d half.

jog of a hack carriage which is paid for at so much an hour. Walter did not suppose this could have anything to say to him, and took no notice, as how should he? But when he approached the house it became more and more evident that something had happened or was happening. A group of idlers were standing about a door, from which came the sound of voices and laughter, altogether festive sounds. Somebody was rejoicing, it was apparent, with that not too refined kind of joy-a happiness unrestrained by any particular regard for the proprieties that belong to such regions. Even this did not rouse Walter. What did it matter to him if some one had been married, or christened, or was going through any of the joyful incidents of life-next door? His mind was full of what she would say, of what she would do, of the steps to be taken in order to complete her deliverance. It would not be his deliverance. It would be his severance from much that had acquired a new value in his eyes. But it would be freedom to her; it would be, whatever she might say, comparative wealth. Why had she so resisted? why, in her position, had she scorned his little fortune? It could only be, he thought, that he might be hindered from sacrificing so much on his

He was deep, deep in thought as he approached. Surely it was next door, this marriage, or whatever it was. It must be next door. The carriage came leisurely up and stopped, the coachman displaying a great wedding favor. It was a marriage, then: strange that he should come with his mind full of that proposal of his, to which he would take no denial, and find a marriage going on next door! He smiled to himself at the odd circumstance, but there was not very much pleasure in his smile. There would soon be another there—but quiet—that at least he would secure—not attended by this noisy revelry, the voices and cheers ringing out into the street. Ah, no! but quiet, the marriage of two people who would have a great deal to think of, to whom happiness would come seriously, not without sacrifices, not without—

But, oh, that sudden shock and pause! what did this mean? It was not at the next house, but at Mrs. Sam Crockford's door that the carriage with the two gray horses drew up. It was there the idlers were standing grouped round to see somebody pass out: the voices came from

within that well-known narrow entrance. Walter stopped, struck dumb, his very breath going, and stood with the rest, to see—what he might see. He heard the stir of chairs pushed from the table, the chorus of good-byes, and then—

The open doorway was suddenly filled by the bridal pair, the bridegroom coming out first, she a step behind. Walter knew the man well enough; he had seen him but once, but that seeing had been sufficient. He came out flushed, in his wedding clothes, his hat upon one side of his head, his white gloves in his hand. "Thank you all; we'll be jolly enough, you needn't fear," he was calling to the wellwishers behind. After him Emmy came forward, perhaps more gayly apparelled than a bride of higher position would have been for her wedding journey, her hat covered with flowers and feathers, her dress elaborately trimmed. She too was a little flushed, and full of smiles and satisfaction. Walter did not stir, he stood and looked on grimly, like a man who had nothing to do with it. It did not seem to affect him at all; his heart, which had been beating loudly, had calmed in a moment. He stood and looked at them as if they were people whom he had never seen before -standing silent in the midst of the loungers of the little street, a few children and women, a passing errand boy, and a man out of work, who stood too with his hands in his pockets and gazed in a sullen way, with a sort of envy of the people who were well-off and well-to-do. The bridegroom had not the same outward deference to his bride which might be seen in other circles. He held her arm loosely in his and dragged her behind him, turning back and shouting farewells to his friends. "Oh, we'll be joyful enough!" he cried, taking no heed to her timid steps. And perhaps Emmy's steps could not be described as timid. She gave his arm a shake to rouse him from the fervor of these good-byes.

"Here, mind what you are doing, Ned, and let's get on,

or we shall miss the train," she said.

Walter stood and gazed stupidly, and took all the little drama in.

And then there ensued the farce at the end, the shower of rice, the old shoes thrown after the departing pair. The jovial bridegroom threw back several that fell into the carriage, and Emmy laughed and cheered him on. They went off in a burst of laughter and gayety. Her quick eye had

glanced at the spectators on either side of the door. Could she have seen him there? She had turned round to her mother, who followed them to the door, and whispered something as they went away: but that was all. Walter stood and watched them drive off; it was all like a scene in a theater to him. He did not seem able to make up his mind to go away.

And then suddenly he felt a touch upon his arm. "Oh, Mr. Penton, is it you? Step in—step in, sir, please, and let me speak to you; I must say a word to you."

"I can see no need for any words," he said, dully; but partly to get free of her, for her touch was intolerable to him, partly because of the want of any impulse in his own mind, he followed her into the house, into the parlor, all full of wedding favors and finery. The bridal party had retired riotously, as was very apparent, to the table in the back room.

"Oh, Mr. Penton, you have been shamefully treated!" Mrs. Sam Crockford cried. She was herself splendid in a new dress, with articles of jewelry hung all over her. She touched her eyes lightly with her handkerchief as she spoke. "Young gentleman," she said, "though I have had to give in to it, don't think I approved of it. My chyild, of course, was my first object, but I had some heart for you too. And you behaved so beautiful! How she could ever do it, and prefer him to you, is more than I can

"Then it was going on all the time?" said Walter, dully. He did not seem to have any feeling on the subject, or to care: yet he listened with a sort of interest as to the argument of the play.

"Sir," said the woman, "everything is said to be fair in love. If it will be any consolation to you, you have helped my chyild to an alliance which—is not greater than her deserts-no, it is not greater than her deserts, Mr. Penton, as you and I know: but so far as money goes was little to be looked for. Edward is not perhaps a young man of manners as refined as we could wish, but he can give her every advantage. He is in business, Mr. Penton. Business has its requirements, which are different to those of art. His mother has just died, who was not Emmy's friend. And he is rich. The business," said Mrs. Sam

Crockford, sinking her voice, "brings in-I can't tell you

how many thousands a year."

Then Walter remembered what Emmy had said about some one who had as much a year as his whole little fortune consisted of, and added that dully to the story of the drama which he was hearing, paying a sort of courteous attention without any interest to speak of. "Why did not she—do this at once? that is what surprises me," he said.

"Mr. Penton, I said all things are fair in love. I am afraid she played you against him to draw him on. She is my only child, it is hard for me to blame her. I don't know that strictly speaking she is to be blamed. A girl has so few opportunities. He proposed a secret marriage, but my Emmy has too much pride for that. You were always with her, Mr. Penton, after she returned, and he was distracted. He thought she was going to marry you. I thought so myself at first: but she played her cards very well. She played you against him to draw him on."

"Oh, she played me against him to draw him on," said Walter. These words kept going through his head while Emmy's mother went on talking at great length, explaining, defending, blaming her chyild. She might as well have said nothing more, for he could not take it in. The words seemed to circle round and round him in the air. They did not wound him, but gave a sort of wonder—a

dull surprise.

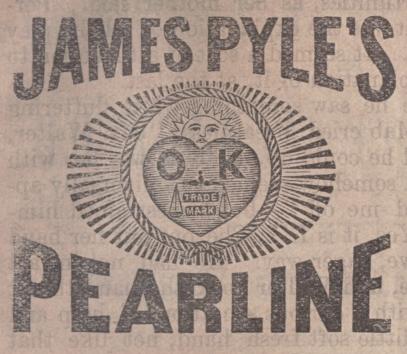
"She played me against him to draw him on." He went back through the endless streets to the railway-station, walking the whole way, feeling as if that long, long course might go on forever, for nights and days, for dreary centuries; and then the railway, with its whirl of noise and motion, completed and confirmed the sense of an endless going on. He could not have told how long he had been away when he walked up the avenue again in the soft darkness of the spring night. His dulled mind mixed this absence up somehow with the previous one, and, with this confusion, brought a curious sense of guilt, and impulse to ask pardon. He would arise and go to his father, and say, "Father, I have sinned." He would kneel down by his mother's side. He could not understand that he had done no harm—that he had only left Penton that day. played me against him to draw him on." It all seemed so simple—nobody's fault—not even perhaps Emmy's—for

girls have so few opportunities, as her mother said. Perhaps it was natural, as it was the explanation of all the play—the mot de l'enigme. It seemed a sort of satisfaction to

have such an ample explanation of it, at the last.

Just inside the gate he saw something white fluttering among the trees, and Mab cried, breathless, "Mr. Walter, is it you?" It was all he could do not to answer her with that explanation which somehow seemed so universally applicable. "She played me off"—but he restrained himself, and only said, "Yes, it is I." She put out her hand to him in an impulsive, eager way. He had not in fact seen her that day before, and Walter took the hand thrust into his in the dark with a curious sensation of help and succor; it was a cool little soft fresh hand, not like that large and clammy member which, thank Heaven, he had nothing to do with any more. And there was an end of it all—there it all ended, in Mab's little frank hand meeting his in the twilight as if she were admitting him to a new world.

Ally was married shortly after, and the marriage was very good for the material interests of the house of Penton. It was a very fine marriage for young Mr. Rochford of Reading, but it was also a fine thing for the family in whose history he had in future more interest than merely that of their man of business. Mab still promises every day that Anne will soon follow her sister's example, and that she herself will be the only one left to fulfill the duties of the grown-up daughter. Her visit has been prolonged again and again, till it has run out into the longest visit that ever was known. Will it ever come to an end? Will she ever go away again, and set up with a chaperon in the house in Mayfair with which she is sometimes threatened by her guardians? Who can tell? There will be many people to be consulted before it can be decided one way or other. But if nobody else's mind is made up, Mab's is very distinct upon this point, as well as upon most others within her range. And she is one of those people who usually have their way.



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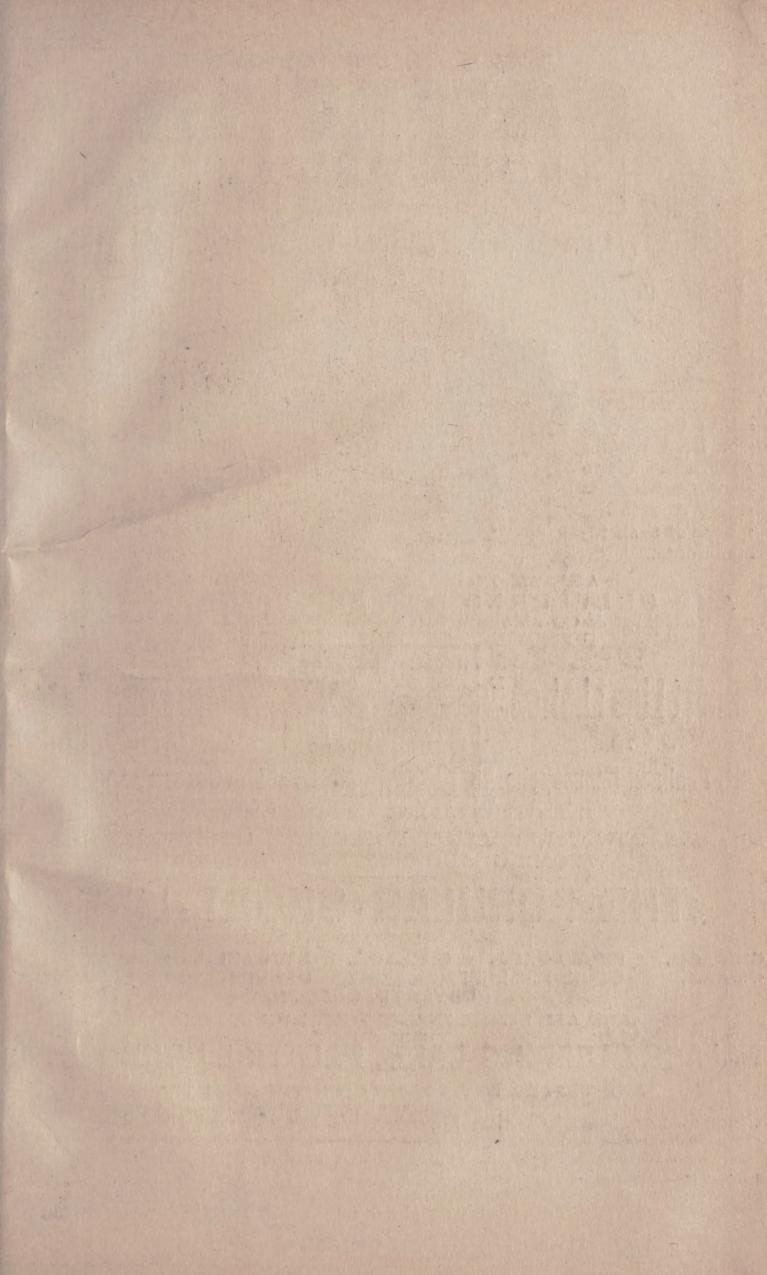
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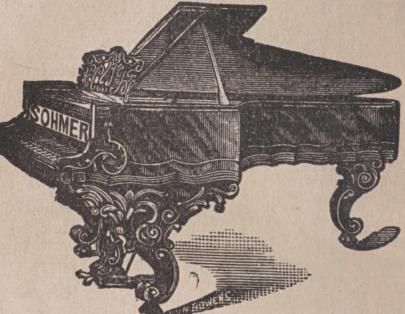
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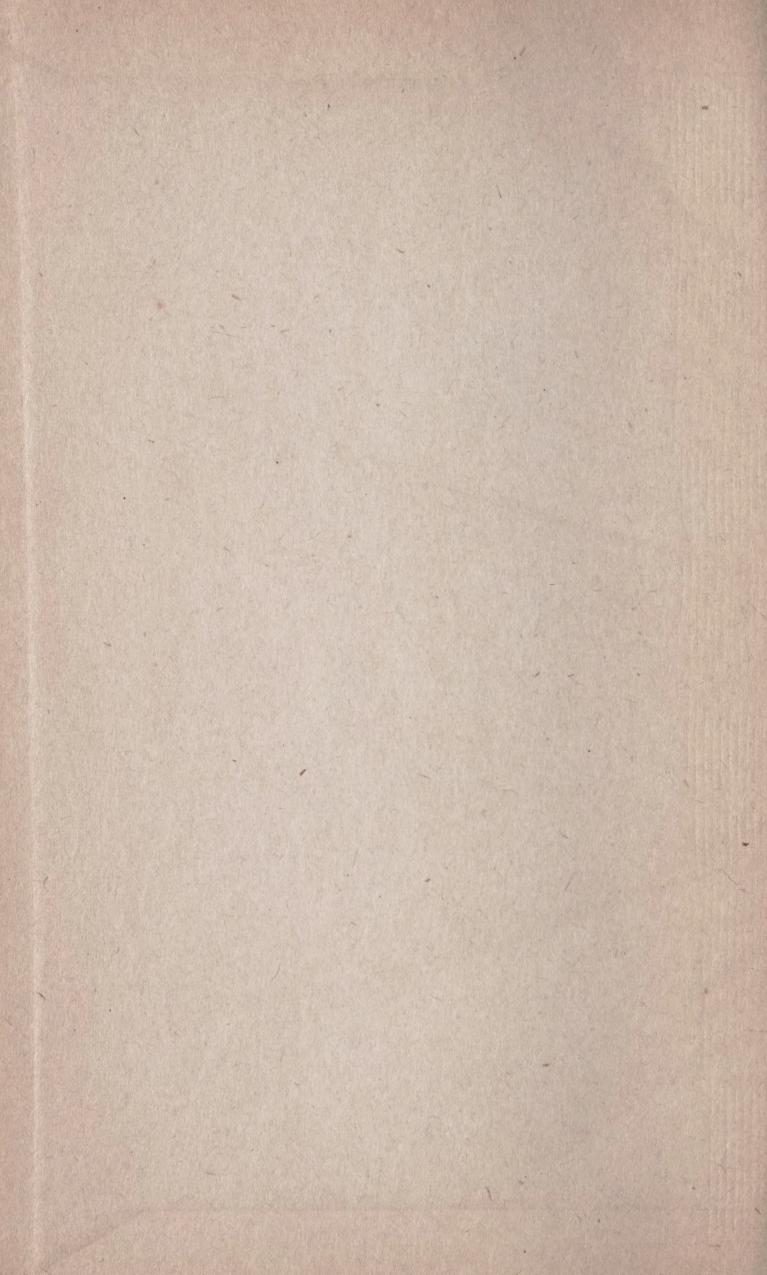
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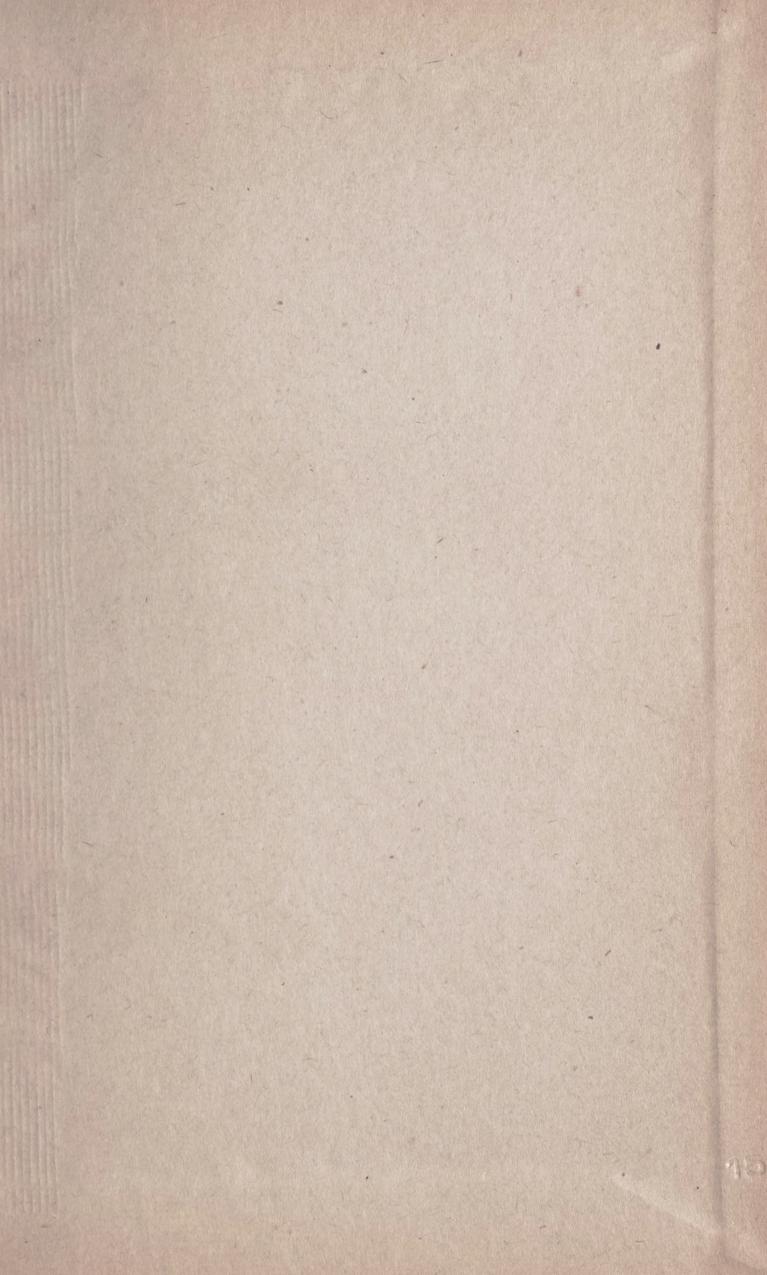
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